MIKE SHAYNE

MYSTERY MAGAZINE

OCTOBER
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All New Stories

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MIKE SHAYNE
Been So Tough

THE HOMICIDAL VIRGIN

A Complete Novel
By BRETT HALLIDAY

Attention: New MIKE SHAYNE Readers

If you're a new reader and have just discovered the wide, exciting variety of the magazine's mystery story fare there's a golden harvest of reading pleasure awaiting you in the back numbers which countless fans have been asking for. We've a few copies left of the 12 issues published during 1959. They are available and are yours at the bargain prices of 35¢ for one; 70¢ for 2 issues; 3 issues for $1.00 and all 12 issues for only $4.00. Just check off the copies you want alongside of the monthly issues listed below—fill in the handy coupon—and mail to us with your check, money order or cash. We pay postage . . . Here are the partial contents of the dozen issues —outstanding stories of all lengths by famed mystery story writers:

JAN. "Death Dives Deep" a Mike Shayne novelet by Brett Halliday; "The Dark Corner" a short novel by Frank Ward; and short stories by Richard Howells Watkins and John Eugene Hasty.

FEB. "Keep Me Out of the Morgue" a Mike Shayne novelet by Brett Halliday; novelets by Lewis Horne and John Jakes; and many short stories.

MARCH "The Twisted Mind" a Mike Shayne novelet by Brett Halliday; "A Hood is Born" a teen-age jungle novelet by Richard Deming; and many shorts.

APRIL "Target: Mike Shayne" a book-length novel by Brett Halliday; and stories by William Lindsay Gresham, Larry Holden and many others.

MAY "Invitation to Murder" a Mike Shayne novelet by Brett Halliday; "The Love Racket" a short novel featuring 'The Toff' by John Creasy.

JUNE "Death Selects the Winner" a Mike Shayne novelet by Brett Halliday; novelets by Theodore Mathieson and Vern Athanas, among others.

JULY "Murder Plays Charade" a Mike Shayne novelet by Brett Halliday; "The Suspicious Bride" a short suspense novel by John Fleming and Lois Eby, and many short stories.

AUGUST "Death Creeps Slowly" a Mike Shayne novelet by Brett Halliday; "Dead End" a Johnny Liddell novelet by Frank Kane; and many others.

SEPT. "Die Like a Dog" a book-length Mike Shayne novel by Brett Halliday; and many short stories by C. B. Gilford, John Creasy, among others.

OCT. "Bury Me Not" a Mike Shayne novelet by Brett Halliday; novelets by Frank Kane and Richard Deming; stories by Bob Bloch, Roy Vickers, and others.

NOV. "Masquerade for Murder" a Mike Shayne novelet by Brett Halliday; novelets by Floyd Wallace and Ruth Malone; and many other stories.

DEC. "Dead on the Hour" a Mike Shayne novelet by Brett Halliday; novelets by Norman Anthony, Theodore Mathieson, Raymond Drennen, among others.

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MIKE SHAYNE

MYSTERY MAGAZINE

OCTOBER, 1960 Vol. 7, No. 5

NEW MIKE SHAYNE NOVEL

THE HOMICIDAL VIRGIN

by BRETT HALLIDAY

It was a murder with so many jagged pieces that working on it was like treading on splinters of broken glass. And its ramifications, Shayne knew, went deep into a dark morass of human wickedness.

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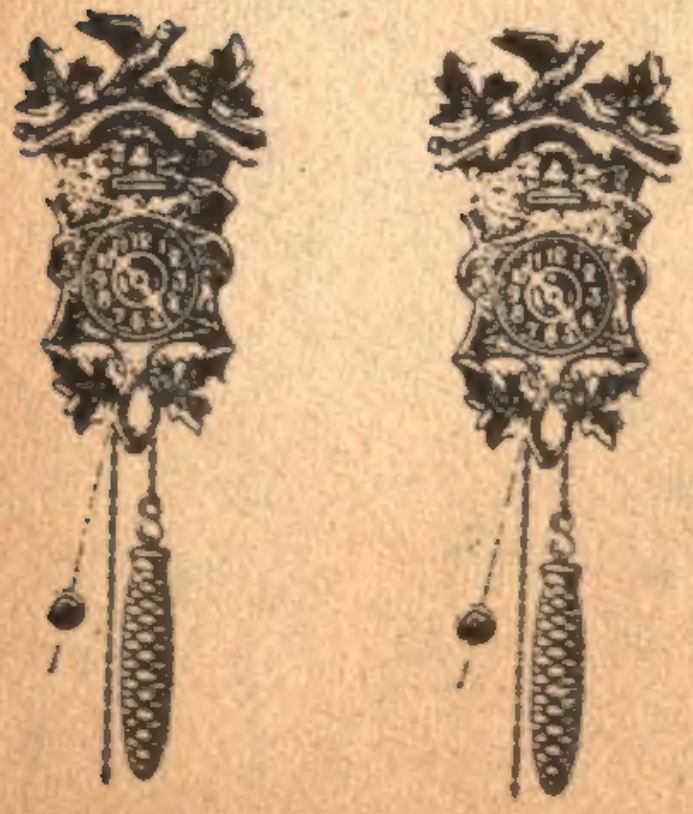

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The HOMICIDAL Virgin

The murder trail was dotted with gravestone-shaped road markings. So Mike took each turn with the dynamic Shayne ruggedness at emergency alert.

by BRETT HALLIDAY

IT WAS ONE OF THOSE beautiful, balmy, autumnal days in Miami when the tempo of life in the Magic City slackens perceptibly; a time for relaxation between the brutally humid days of summer and the frenzied activity of a new winter season when hordes of fun-and-sun-seekers from the north would descend upon the area.

In his office above Flagler Street, with both windows wide open to bring in the sound of sluggish traffic borne on the wings of a somnolent breeze from Biscayne Bay, Michael Shayne was relaxed in a swivel chair with his feet resting on a bare, scarred desk. He wore a short-sleeved sport shirt open at the throat, his red hair was comfortably rumpled, he sucked lazily on a cigarette and was at peace with the world.

© 1960, by Brett Halliday

COMPLETE IN THIS ISSUE

THE NEW MIKE SHAYNE NOVEL

BRUCE MARSHALL

The cigarette was one inch in length when a familiar voice impinged from the outer office. It belonged to Timothy Rourke, and it was offensively cheery: "Hi, Lucy my love. Is the great man in? Busy?"

The typing stopped, and Lucy Hamilton said, "Michael's in and he isn't busy."

Rourke said breezily, "We'll have to do something about that," and came through the doorway.

Shayne raised his ragged eyebrows and sighed. "Hi, Tim," he said, with no great enthusiasm.

Rourke was as lean as a greyhound, with cadaverous features and an inexhaustible store of bouncing vitality that gave a spring to his step and a feverish intensity to his deepset eyes. He drew a square white envelope from the sagging side pocket of a shabby corduroy jacket and dropped it on Shayne's desk as he passed on his way to the filing cabinet against the wall behind the detective.

"Look that over, Mike," he said, "while I pour you a drink of your own good liquor."

Shayne lazily stretched a long arm for the envelope while Rourke opened the third drawer and extracted a bottle of cognac with the ease of long practice. The typewritten address read:

Classified Advertisement Dept.,
The Daily News,
Miami, Florida.

It was postmarked the preceding day at Miami Beach.

Timothy Rourke went to the water cooler and returned to the desk with the cognac and four paper cups. He set the bottle down on a corner of the desk.

Shayne opened the envelope and pulled out a folded square of paper. Doubled inside it was a five-dollar bill. He groped aside for the bottle and absently poured cognac in his empty cup while he read the typewritten message:

Please insert the following advertisement one time in your PERSONAL COLUMN:

MAN WANTED. Adult, red-blooded American. Must be sophisticated, soldier-of-fortune type willing to do anything—repeat, *anything*—if the price is right. Replies addressed to Miss Jane Smith, Suite 1114, 562 Flagler Street, Miami, will be considered in strict confidence.

The enclosed bill will more than cover the cost of a single insertion. Do not bother returning change.

The signature, JANE SMITH was also typewritten.

Shayne looked at his old friend with a noncommittal frown.

"What do you make of it?" Rourke asked.

"Some hot-pantsied housewife eager to get rid of a hubby who's standing in her way. That's as good a guess as any."

"I agree one hundred per cent," Rourke commented wryly. "Wouldn't you like to meet Jane Smith and get the whole sordid story . . . and maybe save hubby's life?"

"Get the story to spread over the front page of the *News* under your by-line," Shayne amplified. "Go out and do your own legwork." He took another sip of cognac, washed it down with a swallow of water.

"But it's right up your alley, Mike." Rourke made his voice lyrically enthusiastic. "You answer the ad, see? You'd be a lead-pipe cinch to land the job. Red-blooded and adult. Sophisticated as all get-out, and a soldier-of-fortune type from hell-and-gone. I don't fit the part."

Shayne yawned and let a faint grin curl the corners of his wide mouth. "It's too hot, Tim. Your Jane Smith will get hundreds of applications to choose from. All the hungry guns in town plus a few dozen bums and a scattering of romantic young fools who fancy themselves in the role."

"You don't seriously think the *News* will run that ad, do you?"

"Why not?" Shayne said. "She sent the money to pay for it."

"A matter of public policy. Hell, you ought to see that. Look, we get maybe half a dozen crackpot ads like this every week. There's a standing rule that they get sent up to the front office for okay be-

fore insertion. Don't you realize we could be sued if we did insert that ad and a murder resulted from it?"

A glint of interest came into Shayne's gray eyes. "I hadn't considered that angle," he admitted.

"And if it is an invitation to murder as you suggested, don't you have a moral duty to try and prevent it?"

Shayne now grinned openly at the reporter. "Nuts, Tim. Turn it over to the police and let them do their moral duty."

"Sure. I can do that. But because of our long-time friendship I felt you deserved a crack at it first."

Shayne's grin widened. "And because you know I'm more amenable than Petey Painter to passing on a front-page story to the demon newshound, Timothy Rourke. It is postmarked from the Beach, isn't it?"

"Yeh. And that makes it Painter's baby. You know how he'd handle a thing like this. Go bulling in and grab the poor gal who may have nothing more vicious in mind than meeting a new man. No matter how innocent her intent may be, Petey would twist it into something nasty and blatantly proclaim another personal triumph in his crusade against crime. Don't you want to protect her from that?"

"How do we know Jane Smith needs protection? Most likely she's a tough old biddy who's grown tired of waiting for Uncle Horace to die so she can collect his fortune."

"Then think about Horace for a moment," urged Rourke. "Poor old guy with his life in jeopardy. His own niece advertising openly for a killer to gun him down."

"But you're not running the ad. So she won't contact any killers and Uncle Horace will remain perfectly free to live to a ripe old age."

"Not if I know our Jane Smith," Rourke declared positively. "Failing in this attempt, she'll try something else. But if she doesn't fail in this attempt . . ." He paused significantly. "If she were to achieve contact with the perfect guy who is willing to do *anything* for the right price . . . then you'd be in a position to dissuade her from whatever she has in mind."

Shayne yawned and drank more cognac. "Chase down your own headlines, Tim. She gives a mailing address. Take it from there."

"I just came from five sixty-two Flagler," grumbled Rourke. "Suite eleven-fourteen is just what you'd expect. A mail-drop to receive and forward letters. Presided over by an old battle-axe who wouldn't give out the correct address of a client if you twisted her arm off. I suppose their clients are mostly extra-marital lovers who are willing to pay plenty for the assurance that their real identities will be protected."

"So she certainly wouldn't give out any information to a private op who comes snooping around."

"Of course not. Only way to get Jane Smith's address out of her is by a police order. And that brings us back to Peter Painter. You going to force me to go to him?"

"I don't see how else . . ." Shayne began.

But Timothy Rourke interrupted him with feverish intensity, "Answer the ad yourself, Mike. Your reply will be the only one she receives. If she's at all serious about this she'll jump at the chance and set up a meeting. You go on from there."

"But she'll be watching the paper and see that her ad doesn't appear. She'll know damned well my reply to it is a phony."

"I've thought that all out, Mike. It's easy. You write her ex-

plaining why her ad wasn't inserted. You say that your girl-friend works in the advertising department and the letter came to her desk to be opened. And instead of sending it on up to the front office for approval, she simply held it out and passed it on to you on account of you're just the man to fill the bill and your gal would like to see you make a fast buck so she can quit her lousy job at the *News* and get married. Doesn't that make sense?"

Shayne stretched and leaned back in the swivel chair, clasping the knobby fingers of both hands behind his neck and furrowing his forehead. He had no important case on hand, and he was bored. And the unknown Jane Smith did intrigue him. He was too seldom intrigued these days.

"Well," he said, unclasping his hands slowly, "If your paper wants to foot the bill, I'll try to establish contact with Jane Smith and see what comes of it."

"Go to it," said Rourke fervently. "All I ask is to have a crack at the story . . . when and if it breaks."

Shayne sat erect and finished his drink, drained the paper cup of water. He smashed all four cups in his two big hands, swung out of the swivel chair and dropped them into a wastebasket beside the water cooler. Then he strode past Rourke into the outer office, and Lucy Hamilton broke the even rhythm of her typing to look over her machine at him inquiringly, competent fingers lying lax on motionless keys. He paused beside the outer door, reaching for a Panama hat on a hook beside it.

"Tim and I are drifting out for a drink," he announced casually. "Close up shop whenever you're in the mood, angel."

"But Michael—"

"See you in the morning, angel. It's a slack week anyway."

IN HIS CORNER hotel suite on the north bank of the Miami River, Michael Shayne selected the smartest piece of luggage he possessed, a five-year-old grayish suitcase of lightweight material for airline travel, and opened it out on the bed to receive a careful selection of clothing to fit the move he intended to make.

He tossed in his most flamboyant pajamas and a silk dressing gown Lucy had given him for Christmas three years before, and two of his most garish sport shirts, laying aside one atrocity with pineapple trees and hula maidens outlined in red against a bilious yellow background to wear when he went out. He added underwear and socks, and a pair of creamy-white Italian silk slacks, toilet articles and clean handkerchiefs.

From the bottom drawer of his bedroom dresser, he lifted out from underneath a pile of white shirts a short-barrelled .38 nestled

in a worn leather holster strapped into an efficient shoulder harness which he hadn't worn for many years. He placed this carefully inside the folds of the slacks at the bottom of the suitcase, spread the other clothes on top of it, and closed the bag.

Downstairs, he stopped at the desk with his bag and told the clerk, "I won't be around during the nights for a few days, Pete. I may give you a phone number later when I can be reached if it's important."

He had already parked his car in its stall in the private garage behind the apartment hotel, and he waved down a passing taxi outside the hotel and got in.

He gave the driver the name of an inconspicuous, middle-class hotel on a side street in the Northwest section between Miami Avenue and the Boulevard. Its reputation was not of the best. It was the kind of hotel where, with the right approach, you could get almost anything without running into serious debt.

There was no doorman when he paid off the cab in front, and he carried his suitcase into a square lobby with a few wilted potted palms and half a dozen shabby lounging chairs. A bored bell-captain came out of his cubicle in the center to take his bag, and a prissy little man behind the desk looked at him incuriously as he signed a registration card: *Mike Wayne, 1270 Riverview Avenue, Bayonne, N. J.*

The clerk slid a key across to the waiting bellhop who had been summoned from the rear by the captain. "Take Mr. Wayne to eight-six," he said.

Eight-six was a clean and pleasant room with double windows. Shayne hung his jacket in the closet and called the desk to see if there was a supply of hotel stationery on hand. There was. He opened his suitcase and began transferring its contents to two bureau drawers, carefully putting the shoulder-holstered pistol on the bottom wrapped in an undershirt where it would certainly be found and reported the first time his room was cased after he went out . . . if he judged the hotel correctly.

His unpacking completed, he sat down and composed a letter on hotel stationery:

Dear Miss Smith:

You will be surprised to receive this letter after you see that your ad didn't appear in the *Daily News*. This is what happened.

The newspaper does not run ads like yours, but my girlfriend that works in the advertising department opened your letter and read it and instead of turning it over to her boss as she was supposed to, she put it in her bag instead and gave it to me at lunch. So I'm the only

one that knows about it and you won't get any other answer but this.

I think I can fill the bill *if the price is right*. You can reach me at this address any time after nine or ten P. M. Hoping to hear from you,

Very truly yours
Mike Wayne.

He fortified himself with a long drink of cognac before reading over what he had written, and even at that he shuddered as he came to the end. But he folded it resolutely and sealed it inside an hotel envelope and addressed it to Jane Smith at her Miami mail drop, and then settled back in an easy chair with his feet up on the windowsill overlooking the Bay to take alternate sips of cognac and ice water while he waited for it to be six o'clock so he could go down and confer with the night clerk to start establishing the new identity of Mike Wayne from Bayonne, New Jersey.

II

BY THE EVENING of the third day Michael Shayne had established himself in the routine of the hotel as a regular who was casually accepted by the staff and the other regulars. He left his room promptly each morning and dropped his key at the desk, did not return until nine or ten in the evening when he would be greeted amiably by the night clerk and given the room number in which a poker game was running that night.

It was a cozy stud-poker set-up, presided over by three residents of the hotel who moved it from one of their rooms to another each night. They played for table stakes with an initial buy of a hundred dollars worth of chips required in order to sit in, and it was a smooth operation designed to milk moderate sums from a succession of suckers as painlessly as possible.

When Shayne sauntered up to the desk at nine-thirty on the third evening, Dick, the night clerk, turned to a pigeonhole behind him and withdrew Shayne's key and a large bulky white envelope. He leaned across the desk and spoke rapidly, "Funny thing this evening, Mr. Wayne. Along about seven a woman called to ask was you in. I told her you never was here before nine. About ten minutes later this chick comes in and asked for you. I can't swear it was

the same one that had just phoned, but I'm pretty sure it was the same voice.

"When I told her you wouldn't be in till nine, she slid a ten-spot across to me and started askin' all these questions. What you looked like, how long you been here, what do you do . . . all that. You never had told me not to answer questions, so I took her money and told her what she wanted to know. One thing in particular she pushed me hard on."

Dick paused to snicker. "This'll kill you. She wanted most special to know if you was a cop. That's one thing I did tell her flat you wasn't." The clerk snickered again, and then added anxiously, "If I did anything wrong . . ."

"You did just right, Dick." Shayne got a five from his wallet and flipped it across to avid fingers.

"Gee, thanks, Mr. Wayne. So she left this here envelope for you and made me promise you'd get it the moment you come in." He passed the thick, sealed envelope across to Shayne.

Words were typed on the front and Shayne read them quizzically. MIKE WAYNE in capital letters, and the message: *Don't unseal this until you walk outside and stand under the light. Then tear it open and remain in plain sight while you read it.*

Shayne grinned at the clerk whom he was sure had read the curious message, and said, "That's a dame for you. Always playing games."

He turned back with the sealed envelope in his hand, went out to stand on the sidewalk under a bright overhead light. Several cars were parked nearby, any one of which might contain someone watching him.

Deliberately, he tore off one end of the envelope and shook the contents out. There was a folded sheet of square paper similar to the one on which the original advertisement had been typed.

He unfolded it and read:

You are being observed every moment. Remain in plain sight while you read this. Then hail the first empty cab that comes along. Get in and have him drive to the Boulevard and out to 79th Street and across the Causeway. You will be followed all the way. Go to the corner of Lime Road and Beach Plaza Place and let the cab go. A blue and white Plymouth sedan is parked at the Northeast corner. Get in and get a further message and the car keys from above the left sun vizor.

Jane Smith

Shayne refolded the sheet of paper and stuffed it back into the white envelope. He slid it into his right coat pocket and looked up the street for an empty cab. He stood

there impassively, his rangy figure outlined in the bright overhead light, for several minutes before a cruising cab pulled in to the curb in answer to his signal.

He got in and directed the driver, "Over to Biscayne and across the Seventy-Ninth Street Causeway."

He settled back sideways in the corner and watched the street behind him with interest as the cab pulled away. A car that had been parked just beyond the hotel entrance eased out from the curb behind them and followed eastward toward the Boulevard.

Shayne relaxed and lit a cigarette, a wry smile curving his lips as he went over the typed instructions in his mind.

Jane Smith was playing it cagey, all right. Up to this point she was taking no chances of being confronted and identified. By having him open the envelope while she watched from a parked car, she had eliminated any possibility of him communicating with a confederate by telephone or otherwise. It was pretty cute figuring and indicated a certain amount of expefience at this sort of thing.

He was comfortably conscious that another car was keeping a sedate and careful distance behind them as they sped up the Boulevard and east across the winding causeway. At the eastern end, he leaned forward and told the driver, "The corner of Lime Road and Beach Plaza Place. Know where it is?"

"Just about. I can find it okay."

Shayne settled back with another cigarette and let the driver find the intersection. It was in a quiet, residential section of palm-lined streets and middle-income homes, devoid of traffic at this hour. As the driver pulled in to the curb and stopped, Shayne noted the headlights of another car pull in half a block behind them. He got out and paid the driver, waited under the corner streetlight until the cab disappeared, and then strode around the corner to a blue and white Plymouth.

He slid under the steering wheel and felt above the sun vizor for another folded sheet of paper and a set of car keys. He groped along the instrument panel until he found the map light and turned it on, and read Jane Smith's second message.

You are still under constant observation. If you have followed instructions thus far, drive to Collins and proceed south to the Palms Terrace Hotel. Stop at the entrance and give your keys to the doorman. He will give you a parking ticket. Go straight through the lobby into the Crystal Room. Sit at an empty table and order a drink and drink it slowly. If I have not sat at your table and accosted you by the time you fin-

ish a second drink, you will know that I do not trust you on closer scrutiny and shall not approach you at all.

In that case, leave the Plymouth in the hotel parking lot and forget about me.

Jane Smith

P.S. It will be useless to try and trace me through the Plymouth. It is stolen.

Shayne grinned wryly as he put the key in the ignition and turned on the headlights. He was developing a very definite admiration for Jane Smith and her devious methods. She had coppered every bet thus far, setting the situation up, with admirable efficiency so she could turn aside at any moment without the slightest chance of a finger being put on her.

He sat very erect and felt a tingle of anticipation travel down his spine as he turned off Collins and slowed in front of the brightly lighted entrance to the Palms Terrace.

A smartly-uniformed doorman snapped the door open for him and asked deferentially, "May I have it parked for you, sir?"

Shayne said, "Please," and handed him the keys, receiving a numbered parking ticket. He didn't look behind him at an arriving car as he went into the hotel lobby and spotted the neon-lighted entrance to the Crystal Room across at his right.

The Crystal Room of the Palms Terrace Hotel was very like hundreds of other cocktail lounges in similar resort hotels throughout the area. Discreetly lighted to provide an atmosphere of intimacy conducive to assignations, with a lavish decor and soft-spoken, attentive waiters, with the best brands of liquor served at high prices, it was a congenial spot for hotel guests to spend the dull evening hours in the hope of meeting other bored guests—preferably of the opposite sex.

Shayne paused momentarily in the doorway, and then lounged over to the third empty table from the entrance and sat in the chair facing in that direction, drawn out for him by an eager, white-jacketed waiter.

Shayne said, "Cognac with ice water on the side. A drink, not a pony. I'd prefer Monnet if you have it."

He had finished his first drink and was well started on a second when a very young girl in a plain black print dress with an almost virginal look of timidity about her approached his table and sat down beside him. She fluttered incredibly long and incredibly black lashes over violet eyes, and asked in a small voice, "What are you drinking?"

"Cognac." Shayne lifted his glass and swallowed half of it.

"That's a kind of brandy, isn't it? Imported from France?"

Shayne said, "That's right," with amusement in his voice.

"Well, wouldn't you . . . wouldn't it be more private up in my suite? I'm sure I can order a bottle of whatever you want from Room Service."

"I think that's an extremely good idea." Shayne finished off his drink and took a sip of ice water. He looked around for the waiter and crooked a bony finger at him, got out his wallet and extracted a bill.

The waiter brought a bar-check face down on a silver dish and Shayne laid the bill on top of it without looking at the amount.

He left fifty cents when the waiter brought his change, then got up and moved behind the girl to draw her chair back. She stood beside him, the top of her glistening black hair barely coming above his shoulder, and Shayne tucked her arm in his and led her toward the doorway.

III

JANE SMITH UNLOCKED a door on the Fourth floor and stood aside to allow Shayne to enter a pleasant sitting room that showed no sign whatsoever of human occupancy. Two floorlamps were lighted at opposite ends of the room, and two closed doors led off to what Shayne assumed would be bedroom and bath.

The girl closed the door tightly behind her while Shayne strolled across the room, and asked in a controlled voice, "Cognac, you said? Any particular brand?"

He stopped at curtained windows and turned with a reassuring smile. "I don't really need a drink, Jane."

"But I want you to have one," she told him with quiet dignity, crossing to the telephone and putting her hand on it. "Please tell me what to order."

"Just ask for a double shot of Monnet cognac . . . with a pitcher of ice. And whatever you want."

She lifted the instrument and tilted her chin determinedly, said, "Room Service, please," into the mouthpiece, and then: "This is number four twenty-six. Miss Smith speaking. I'd like a double cognac . . . Monnet, please."

She replaced the receiver and told Shayne, "It will be sent right up."

He moved away from the window to a deep chair at the end of the room, and sank into it, stretched his long legs out in front of him and advised her, "Sit down and relax. You're wound up as tight as a violin string."

She crossed to the sofa close to him and dropped into it, curling her feet up under her.

Shayne said gravely, "Was it you tailing me tonight?"

"Yes. All the way from your hotel in Miami." She drooped her lashes and caught her underlip be-

tween her teeth. "Who else do you think I could trust?"

Shayne said honestly, "I don't know. In fact, I don't know very much about anything. Except here we are . . . and I'm willing to listen."

"You don't know how awful I felt," she burst out, "when the *News* didn't run my advertisement in the Personal Column. I just felt like it was the end of the world. I had considered the possibility that they might refuse it," she added honestly. "But I tried so darned hard to make it sound innocent and innocuous. I guess I didn't succeed, did I?"

There was a knock on her door. She uncurled her legs and got up to admit a bellboy with a tray. He set the tray on a coffee table in front of the sofa and offered her a check and a pencil to sign it with. She tipped him before Shayne could reach into his pocket for some change and he went out.

As soon as they were alone again Shayne got his double cognac from the tray and carried it with the glass of ice water to his chair. He sank back and took a meditative sip, and then asked bluntly, "What's all the cloak and dagger stuff about, Jane? Supposing the price *is* right . . . exactly what do you want from me?"

She said firmly, "I think I should know a great deal more about you before I go into that." She hesitated, then asked timidly, "Are you a professional gunman?"

Before Shayne could reply she went on quickly: "You don't act or sound like one. Or at least the way I always thought one would be."

Shayne took a sip of his drink. "Disappointed?"

"No. I'm delighted that you're so personable and . . . well, literate. It makes it a lot easier to talk to you. But . . . what do you do for a living?"

"Anything to pick up a fast buck. I once killed a man, Jane, if that's what you're getting at. I exist on the edge of the law," he went on, choosing his words carefully, "and haven't a great respect for the way justice is administered in this country."

"The clerk at your hotel intimated that you are a gambler."

"Not a professional. But I do like to eat . . . and drink good cognac." He lifted his glass in a salute and drank from it.

"Tell me about your girl at the newspaper office. Are you in love with her?"

"We've got a thing about each other. How does she come into this?"

"She doesn't, of course. Except to help me understand what motivates you. If you are in love with a nice girl you're more likely to understand my problem and sympathize with me. And if you need a lot of money in a hurry to enable you to get married and change

your way of life, that would be an important incentive, I should think."

He said, "I came here to listen to a proposition, Jane. I've got a gun and it's for hire . . . if the job appeals to me and the price is right." Leaning back relaxed in his chair, Shayne's gaze brooded on her face. "How old are you, Jane?"

"Nineteen."

"At least, that's past the age of consent in Florida."

She blushed and averted her face from his, gave her entire attention to sucking lemonade from her glass.

"Relax, child," Shayne said. "I was just trying to find out something about you in my own inimitable way."

"Did you?" she asked in a small voice.

"I think so." Shayne took another sip of cognac and made his voice briskly businesslike again. "Take your own time about getting it off your chest."

"Would you like to make fifty thousand dollars?"

"Sure. Who wouldn't?"

"But . . . is that enough to . . . to induce you to kill a man?"

"Who do you want killed, Jane?"

"My step-father."

Shayne said steadily, "I'm listening, Jane."

"His name is Saul Henderson. He married my mother four years ago." She spoke rapidly, as though she had carefully memorized the speech. "I liked him at first. He seemed gentle and kind, and mother needed him. Mother always needed a man. Someone to make over her and look after her. He didn't have much money but that didn't matter because mother had plenty. And he was good to her, and good for her. She positively bloomed the first few months. It was a marvelous transformation and it made me very happy. And then . . ." Her voice faltered.

She continued to stare at him unblinking and he saw the humiliation and pain in her eyes. "Oh, I can't tell you, Mike Wayne. I simply can't. I thought I could after I met you tonight, but now the words won't come out. I can't *form* them on my lips. I'll die of shame."

Shayne sat rigidly motionless while her tempest of emotion spent itself. Then, without lifting her head, her voice muffled and toneless, she began talking again.

"It happened when I was sixteen. He assaulted me in a bedroom beside the one where my mother lay dying of cancer. I couldn't cry out and let her know. I *couldn't*."

She drew herself erect, smoothing back her hair. "Tonight you thought I was a sweet young thing. I saw it in your eyes." She stood rigidly at the window with her back to him.

Shayne said, "I'll stick around

awhile, Jane Smith. Why don't you go back and sit down and tell me more about the situation?"

She turned and looked at him. "You mean it, don't you? You're not utterly revolted by the sight of me?"

"I'm not revolted at all," Shayne assured her flatly. "What I do wonder right now is what sort of hold your step-father still has on you that makes his murder seem the only way out. What sort of hold has he over you? You said your mother is dead."

"Yes. She died two months ago." Jane Smith returned composedly to the sofa. "Adoring my step-father and believing him to be the finest man on earth. She left a will dividing her estate evenly between us, naming him as my legal guardian and placing my share of the money in trust to be administered by him as he sees fit until I'm twenty-one. Two years from now. Two years of being under his thumb . . . at his beck and call. Two more years during which I can't call my soul my own. Living in the same house with him. Lying in my bed at night trembling with fear that he will walk in through the door and force his attentions upon me. Dying a thousand deaths each night he doesn't come, and consumed with hatred and shame when he does." Her voice died away listlessly.

Shayne said harshly, "Do you mean that you're going on with the affair even after your mother's death?"

"What else can I do? I have no money except what he doles out to me. Nothing. I'm utterly dependent on him for what I eat."

"Defy him," said Shayne savagely. "My God, this is the Twentieth Century. Slavery has gone out of style."

She said, "You don't know Saul Henderson."

"You must have some money of your own. Walk away from him and use it. How much is your share of the estate worth?" he demanded abruptly.

"About a quarter of a million."

"Which will come to you with no strings attached in two years. Go out and borrow on it if you need cash to break away from him. Hell, the town is full of moneylenders who'll advance you whatever you need."

"You don't quite understand, Mike Wayne . . . or whatever your name is. There was an added provision in mother's will. I told you she looked on Saul as a sort of god. I get my share *only* if I conduct myself like a devoted daughter and live in his house under his discipline until I'm of age. If I fail to do that . . . and he can prove it in court . . . my share reverts to him and I'll be dependent on him for the rest of my life."

"What happens if Henderson dies before you're twenty-one?"

"Then I get my half at once.

Don't you see? That's what I'm banking on. He doesn't deserve to live. And the moment he dies, I'm free. That's why I mentioned fifty thousand dollars. I haven't anything right now, but the moment Saul Henderson is dead I can pay anything. I'll give you a demand note. I'll sign any sort of legal document you want so you can collect after his death. It's as simple as that. Will you or won't you?"

"Kill your step-father so you can collect your share of your mother's estate immediately?" asked Shayne.

"So I can become a free woman," she cried out wildly. "So I can rid myself of the horror of his presence. I can't go on like this—"

"Then walk away from him," Shayne advised her evenly.

"He'll follow me and bring me back. Legally, he's my guardian."

"You can prefer charges against him. Tell any judge in the country what you've just told me, and he'll spend the rest of his life in jail while you enjoy your inheritance."

"I've threatened him with that," she cried out desperately, "and he laughs at me. He says to go ahead and try to make it stick. And even if I did succeed, think of the disgrace and scandal. It would be a Roman Holiday for the newspapers. I can't face that. I just can't."

"Almost anything is better than murder," Shayne told her.

"I'm in love," she told him in a choked voice. "For the first time in my life, I know what love is. I'm engaged to a boy who would lose all of his love for me if he ever found out the truth. That's one of the reasons I asked you if you loved your friend. I thought you'd understand better."

Shayne got to his feet and walked across to stand over her as she huddled defensively away from him on the sofa. He spoke gently.

"This is a hell of a story you told me, Jane, and if it's true, your step-father deserves to be shot. But that's neither here nor there. There are laws to take care of people like Saul Henderson. If you'll come with me tonight, I'll guarantee you'll never have to see him again. I can't guarantee you'll end up with your inheritance, but I think there's a good chance you will."

"But it would mean testifying against him, wouldn't it? Standing up in court and admitting what I did . . . the sort of horrible person I am. It would mean losing the boy I love."

"It would mean preferring charges against him," said Shayne evenly. "I doubt it would come into open court. Judges are human, and there are ways of handling things like this."

"But he would just deny everything," she said tearfully. "I haven't any proof. It would be my word against his. And everyone

would believe him. I'd just be an hysterical teen-ager."

Shayne controlled his exasperation and said, "Jane, there's only one answer . . . and that's to never go back into his house again. Come with me tonight. I'll take you to my girl-friend's apartment. Give up this crazy idea of hiring someone to murder him. You'll just end up in the electric chair yourself if you don't."

The girl was clearly on the verge of hysteria. There was only one course of action that made sense. He got out his wallet and took one of his own business cards from it, and scribbled his home telephone number on it before handing it to her.

He said, "This guy Michael Shayne is a close friend of mine. He's legal, but he knows how to cut corners and I guarantee he can be trusted. He can help you if anybody in the world can. That's his private number I've written down. Settle back and think over everything I've said. If you decide you want help, call Michael night or day. And God help you, Jane Smith," he ended under his breath as he turned away from her and walked out of the hotel suite.

IV

MICHAEL SHAYNE did not return to his newly rented hotel room that night. He took a taxi directly from the Beach to his own apartment hotel on the north bank of the Miami River.

As soon as he reached his room he put through a call to the *News*. The City Desk told him Tim Rourke had checked out for the night, and Shayne called his home number.

"Mike! I've been wondering how the hell you made out with Jane Smith. I haven't had a single damned word from you since we talked about her."

"I just made contact tonight. Left her in a hotel on the Beach half an hour ago."

"And?"

"There's no story, Tim."

"What kind of talk is that? There must be *some* story. Why are you holding out on me?"

"Nothing your paper could publish, Tim." Shayne paused and took a sip of cognac. "But there's a chance . . . a slim chance . . . that she may be calling in Mike Shayne, in person. If she does that, I might have something for you eventually."

"I'm coming around," Rourke said eagerly. "You at home?"

"Sitting here with a drink and wondering whether Jane Smith will come to her senses and telephone me."

Rourke said, "See you," and hung up.

For the next fifteen minutes Shayne busied himself with putting more ice cubes in a tall glass.

When Rourke arrived he brushed aside Shayne's offer of a drink.

"Exactly what was her proposition?" Rourke demanded without preamble, his face flushed.

"She offered me fifty grand to murder a man for her."

"Good Lord! And you say there's no story in it? What more do you want for a headline?"

"There's no headline in this one, Tim."

"You can't *do* that to me," cried Rourke. "You've got my tongue hanging out a mile. You know it'll be in strictest confidence if you say so. When have I ever jumped the gun on you? When have I ever abused a confidence?"

Shayne shook his red head adamantly. "No soap this time. She's too nice a kid, awfully young —about nineteen. It's too explosive to take the slightest chance with it. Look, Tim," he went on wearily. "I know you and how your mind works. With all the best intentions in the world, you couldn't lay off this if you tried. You'd start digging for background stuff . . just on the chance it might break some time in the future so you'd be in a position to capitalize on it. And I can't risk anything like that."

Suddenly the telephone shrilled between them.

Shayne's big hand shot out to grasp it. A frown of disappointment furrowed his brow when Lucy Hamilton's voice said over the wire, "I hope you weren't asleep or busy, Michael."

"I was neither. Tim Rourke is here sopping up my liquor."

"Oh. Well, I called because something came up this afternoon after you left the office. A Mr. David Waring of the Southern Mutual Insurance Company came in to talk about putting you on an annual retainer. I told him you aren't terribly tied up right now, and I ended up going out to dinner with him. He just dropped me off home, and I did a terrific selling job on you."

"It was a long dinner," said Shayne crossly.

"Michael!" Her amused voice made three distinct syllables out of his name. "I do believe you're jealous."

"Of course I'm not jealous."

"Well, he's fat and a lot of fun."

"Good clean fun, I'll bet. All right, angel. Put him on the phone and I'll talk to him."

"You are jealous," she said wonderingly. "And you're trying to trick me. He isnt here, silly. I told you he dropped me off."

"I know what you told me. Okay Lucy. I'm waiting for an important telephone call. Get your beauty sleep and I'll see you in the morning."

He hung up and stared bleakly at Rourke, then sighed and dragged the telephone directory closer and looked up the number of the Palms Terrace Hotel on Miami Beach.

He gave the number to Pete who also handled the switchboard at night, and when he got the hotel, he said, "Jane Smith, please. Suite four twenty-six."

There was a moment of waiting, and then the girl said, "I will give you the desk." A man's brisk voice came over the wire a few seconds later. "The desk. May I help you?"

"I'm trying to reach Miss Jane

"I'm sorry, sir. Miss Smith checked out about an hour ago."

"Did she leave a forwarding address?"

"No, sir. She left in quite a rush."

Shayne said, "Thank you," and hung up. He looked across at Rourke and said tonelessly, "She checked out of the hotel right after I left her."

Rourke lifted his glass and said, "So that disposes of Jane Smith. If she keeps trying, she'll find plenty of guys to do the job for her." He emptied his glass with a flourish. "Okay, Mike. Send a bill to the *News* for your expenses. It was a good try." Rourke stood up. "If you don't mind," he said politely, "I guess I'll drift along. Thanks for the drink."

Very formally, Shayne said, "You're always welcome."

He waited until Rourke had his hand on the doorknob and then asked, "Does the name Saul Henderson mean anything to you, Tim?"

"Saul Henderson?" The reporter turned slowly, speculative interest in his eyes. "What about him?"

"That's what I'm asking you," said Shayne patiently. "Do you know anything about him?'

"Sure. What connection has a guy like Henderson got with Jane Smith or this thing tonight?"

"I didn't say he had any connection."

"I know you didn't." Rourke released the doorknob and turned back into the room. "All the same it made me wonder . . . in view of the fact that Henderson has a step-daughter about nineteen years old. Utterly charming, I'd say, and what a guy like you might well call a 'nice girl'."

Shayne said, "So what? I didn't ask you about Henderson's step-daughter."

"I know you didn't." For a brief moment their glances interlocked. Rourke's gaze, keen and challenging; Shayne's, cool and unperturbed. Then Rourke sighed and shrugged his shoulders. "All right, Mike. Saul Henderson. A thumbnail sketch. He's been a resident of the Beach for a few years, running a small brokerage house, I think. Dabbled in public affairs and been on a few committees. I think his wife died recently, and there've been rumors that he inherited a million or so. Whether that's true or not, he's being groomed to run for mayor of Miami Beach in the next election as

the reform candidate. His candidacy isn't official, but it's pretty well in the bag, I guess."

"What sort of man is he personally?'

"I met him once at some civic dinner. Bland, easy-going type. Pleasing personality."

Shayne said harshly, "I'd like the opportunity to size him up for myself."

"Easiest thing in the world. He's been tossing some parties since his wife's death. I'll get you and Lucy an invite."

"Why Lucy?" Despite himself, Shayne was unable to keep a note of venom out of his voice.

If Rourke detected it he gave no indication. "I'd say Saul Henderson has got a roving eye for a pretty gal. Lucy's more likely to make time with him than you are."

Shayne said, "All right. Maybe I can concentrate on the stepdaughter. Don't forget it, Tim. The sooner the better."

Rourke said, "I'll ask around in the right places tomorrow." He half-turned back to the door, hesitated and asked, "You still determined to clam up on Jane Smith?"

"I have to, Tim."

The telephone rang and Shayne grabbed for it. Rourke paused to listen, half-way out the door.

The desk clerk's voice said conspiratorily, "There's a doll here to see you, Mr. Shayne. A real doll."

He said, "Send her on up, Pete."

"Sure. I would've, but I thought maybe you'd like a chance to get rid of that reporter first . . . for one like this here."

Shayne said, "Tim Rourke is on his way out." He hung up and stood up, moved toward the door telling Rourke pleasantly, "You are, you know. Down the stairs, Tim." He took his arm firmly and led him past the elevator.

"You don't need to give me the bum's rush," Rourke protested. "Is it Jane Smith?"

"I don't know, but I'm hoping. Down the stairs with you, pal, and no peeking when I meet the elevator." He heard it stopping behind him and gave the reporter a little shove down the stairs, then turned and strode back along the corridor as the elevator door opened.

A woman got out and paused uncertainly. She wore a low necked ruby-red dress with a shortsleeved Angora jacket, and Harlequin glasses that were tinted a light blue.

V

SHE TURNED TOWARD Shayne as she heard his approaching footsteps, and smiled tentatively. "I took the chance of coming directly to you without telephoning because I did not know what I could say over the telephone," she said. "I saw you tonight at the Crystal Room. Perhaps you did not see

me. You were occupied with a prettier and younger girl?"

Shayne turned her toward his open door and she walked beside him with a lithe, free-swimming stride, matching her steps exactly with his. Inside his sitting room, he closed the door while she moved across to the sofa against the wall and sat down.

He picked up the cognac bottle from the center table, paused beyond the end of the sofa to reach for a squat bottle of white creme de menthe from a wall cabinet. In the small kitchen he half-filled a quart measuring pitcher with ice cubes, poured in a brimming cup of cognac and a careful three ounces of the sweet liqueur. Stirring it leisurely with a tablespoon, he carried the pitcher back to the table and got two cocktail glasses from the cabinet.

He filled both of them and crossed to hand her one, then returned to lounge into his chair by the table. He said, "You have the advantage of me."

My name is Hilda Gleason. Mrs. Harry Gleason. I recognized you from having seen your picture in the Miami papers. Not once, but many times."

Her voice rose slightly. "I sat at the bar, distraught and frightened and so alone. And the thought came to me that Michael Shayne was the one person in the whole world who might be able to help me. So I got my nerve to approach you, but then . . . you were otherwise occupied."

"What sort of help do you need Mrs. Gleason?"

"To find my husband before . . . before there is a tragedy and it is too late to prevent it. He is in Miami and I cannot find him."

He said, "Relax and tell me about it. And for God's sake, can't you take off those glasses? I've got a hunch you're hiding a pair of beautiful eyes behind them and it seems a silly thing to do." He emptied his glass and crossed to the sofa to sit close beside her.

Dutifully, she removed her Harlequin glasses. Her eyes were soft brown and luminous. Without her glasses, Shayne decided she must be in her late thirties.

"Harry came to Miami a week ago from our home in Illinois near Chicago. For some reason that he refused to tell me, but I sensed it had danger for him. Something to do with getting a large sum of money. He made big promises with hints about this and that, you understand, though I begged him to do nothing foolish. But he has become a changed man in the last two months. Silent and brooding much of the time, and with wild fits of anger against the unjustness of life that we have so little when others less deserving have so much. And it angered him when I said we were comfortable with his salary and mine, and that I could be happy with so little, and this

thing grew and festered in his mind while he formed some plan for getting money which I think is dangerous."

"This is all pretty ambiguous, Mrs. Gleason. Tell me more about your husband as a person. What does he do for a living Details are always helpul."

"He's a bartender. He is a fine man," she went on in a rush of words. "We have been married ten years with great happiness."

"And now you're afraid he's embarked on some criminal enterprise in the hopes of getting a big wad of money fast?"

"That is what I fear, yes.

"But you have no idea what sort of plan he has in mind?

"No. He does not tell me this. Only in a note that he is leaving for Miami and when he returns in a week or two we will have much money. I must find him in this city, but I do not know where to look. So when I see you in the bar tonight I think this is Providence. They say this is your city, Mr. Shayne. That you know the secret

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places and have ways of getting information that is not known even to the police. Without your help it is hopeless."

"Unless you can give me some sort of lead it's still hopeless. I don't know what I can do. If you had any idea what he's up to . . . what sort of contacts he has here."

"There is that girl," she said convulsively. "I know she is evil. That she has led Harry to this." Her brown eyes became round and more luminous, staring into his. Her fingers hurt the hard flesh of his arm.

"What girl?"

"The one who spoke to you tonight. Whom you walked out with and went up in the elevator with. What did she tell you? What did she want of you? Did she say the name of Harry Gleason?"

"Jane Smith?" ejaculated Shayne in complete surprise. "What do you know about her?"

"That she is young and beautiful. That she can twist men around her little finger to do her bidding. As she twisted Harry and, as I have no doubt, she tried to twist you tonight. For what purpose, Mr. Shayne? Why did she take you to her room?"

"What do you really know about her?" Shayne asked.

"That is her name? Jane Smith?"

"That's the name she gave me."

"I did not know. She came once to the town of Algonquin where we live. It was a week or two weeks after Harry first started to change and be angry about life and money. There was a long distance call—from a town near Chicago, fifty miles south from us. Denton, Illinois. It was for Harry and he listened and grunted yes and no, and I went to the kitchen, and at the end he said in a low voice, 'I quit work at twelve at the Elite Bar. I'll talk to you then.' And he hung up and did not mention the conversation to me afterward.

"And a little before midnight I went to the bar where Harry worked and looked in the window. She was there on a stool. I did not know her, but I knew she was the one. I waited in the street shadow until midnight when the bar closed, and Harry came out with her. They got in a parked car and she drove away. Harry did not come home for two hours."

Hilda Gleason emptied her glass and pursed her lips, looking down at it and continuing her recital in a monotone: "There were no more calls and I did not see her after that. But Harry got worse. His irritation and his threatening of what he would do. I knew it was that girl. I knew she preyed on his mind and he was planning something bad, but I didn't know what it was."

"How long ago was this?"

"Four or five weeks ago."

"Did Harry say anything about her to you?"

"Never a word. And I didn't

ask. I always believed a man had a right to his own secrets."

"And he left home without telling you what he planned to do in Miami?"

"That's right. With just a note for me when I got home from work."

"How did you locate Jane Smith here?"

"That was purely fate. It was this afternoon on the street. I saw her getting on a Miami Beach bus and I knew her at once. So I suspected Harry had come here to meet her, and I got on the same bus and got off when she did and followed her to that expensive hotel. I stayed around the lobby a long time thinking maybe I'd see Harry, and went back this evening to wait some more. And when you came in the bar I recognized you right away and decided I'd ask you to help me. Then *she* came in and walked over and took you away from me. Who is she and what has she got to do with Harry?"

Shayne said, "I don't know," with real perplexity. "I met her for the first time tonight."

"Is it a detective case you're working on?"

"Sort of."

"Make her tell you where Harry is, Mr. Shayne. All I want is to see him and talk to him before he does something dreadful. I know I can persuade him to come back home with me. I don't care what he's done with her. I love him and I want him back."

"I don't even know that I'll see Jane Smith again," he told her cautiously.

"How else will I ever find him?"

Shayne shook his head slowly, tugging at his earlobe. What on earth had a girl from Miami Beach been doing out in a small town in Illinois a month ago meeting a married bartender after working hours? Had she already been started on her quest for a man to murder her step-father? Had a Harry Gleason of Algonquin, Illinois, been suggested to her by someone as a likely prospect for the job? If she had made such an offer and he accepted, why had she sent that ad to the newspaper?

He said slowly, "One thing I think I can reassure you about, Mrs. Gleason. From things the girl told me this evening, I don't believe your husband is having an affair with her."

"Do you think I care about that?" She cried out scornfully "He can have all the other women he wants if he just comes home to me afterward."

"Describe him to me," Shayne said.

"He's tall and has blue eyes. Going a little bald in front, but not bad for a man of forty-six. Thin-faced, I think you would say. He's been a good husband to me for ten years and I would do

anything to get things back the way they were before."

Shayne sat back and drummed his fingertips on the table. "I wish you'd think back very carefully and try to remember any hints Harry dropped that might indicate *how* he hoped to get a lot of money in Miami. By a holdup, perhaps? Blackmail?"

"I don't know, Mr. Shayne. I've thought and thought, and there was never anything I could put my finger on. I just know it was something crooked and dangerous. Else, why wouldn't he tell me? You must help me find him."

Shayne said, "I'll try, Mrs. Gleason. Where can I reach you?"

She gave him a street address in the downtown Northeast section of the city. He stood up as she did, and again was pleased with her long free stride as they went out of the door and down the corridor together.

He took both her hands in his and faced her as they waited for the car to come up. "Keep on hoping, and I'll do my level best to find your husband for you."

She squeezed his fingers and told him, "I feel better right this minute than I have for a long time." She hadn't put her glasses back on and she looked up into his eyes with a look of honest gratitude that told him he could kiss her goodnight if he wished.

He decided he didn't. He smiled down at her and continued to hold her hands until the elevator door opened behind her. Then he said gently, "Good night, Hilda," and stepped back while the door shut.

He frowned wryly as he walked back to his sitting room. This had certainly been an evening to try a man's credulity. First, Jane Smith with her harrowing tale of sexual depravity, and then Mrs. Gleason with her even more difficult-to-believe story of a missing husband.

Right at the moment Shayne didn't know which woman he had the more faith in. Connected as they both were with utter improbabilities, it was almost impossible to believe that both of them had been speaking the whole truth and nothing but the truth all the way through.

VI

A LITTLE BEFORE noon Shayne dropped by the hotel where he had a room under the name of Wayne to get his things and check out. With his key, the clerk handed him a telephone message. It was stamped ten o'clock that morning and said, "Call Mr. Paul Winterbottom at once," and a telephone number followed.

Shayne went up to his room with a frown of perplexity on his face. He didn't know anyone named Winterbottom, and besides, who could be calling Mike

Wayne at this hotel? The only person who knew that a Mike Wayne was registered there was the Jane Smith of the preceding night.

In his room he went directly to the telephone and asked for the number on the telephone message. A diffident and young-sounding masculine voice answered.

Shayne asked, "Paul Winterbottom?" and the young man answered "Oh? Would that be . . . is this Mike Wayne?"

"Yes."

"Could I see you right away, Mr. Wayne? It's terribly important and I can take my lunch hour now."

"What about?"

"It's a personal matter." Paul Winterbottom cleared his throat and lowered his voice. "Pertaining to . . . a young lady whom you met on the Beach last night."

Shayne said, "Okay. Where?"

"There's a quiet little bar on Eighth Street, just East of Miami Avenue. The Dolphin. Could you meet me there in about ten minues?"

"Okay."

There were a few men at the bar, and only the rear booth was occupied. A young man sat facing the front with a glass of beer in front of him, and he got to his feet with a nervous smile as Shayne walked back toward him. "Mr. Wayne?" He held out a limp hand. "I'm so glad you could come. Let me bring you a drink from the bar. Then we won't be disturbed."

Shayne said, "Cognac with a glass of ice water on the side." He sat down across from the glass of beer. Paul Winterbottom seemed pleasant enough. In his early twenties, sandy-haired and slender. Wearing a well-pressed but cheap cord suit and a white shirt with a dark bow tie.

He came back with a pony of cognac and a glass of ice water which he set in front of the detective. Then he reseated himself and began turning his glass round and round in a little pool of beer on the table while he stared down at it, and said in a low voice, "I know you must think that Muriel . . . she told you her name was Jane Smith . . . . was absolutely insane last night. Well, she isn't. Not really."

He lifted his head to gaze at the detective soberly. "She didn't mean it, Mr. Wayne. Not actually. She was just on the verge of hysteria. My God, I was appalled when she told me her crazy plan. About sending the advertisement to the newspaper and all. I didn't have the slightest idea. I thought she was in New York all last week when she was right here in a hotel cooking up that crazy thing about hiring someone to kill her stepfather."

Shayne asked, "Did she tell you the whole story?"

"Yes. She telephoned me right after you gave her some good advice and walked out on her. I didn't even know she was in town, like I say. She was practically hysterical and I couldn't understand her at first. What hurt most, of course, was that she hadn't come to me with her problem. Kept it bottled up inside her all this time." He drew in a deep breath and squared his shoulders. "Now that I know about it, she'll never go back to that house again, I can promise you that. I put her on a plane to New York at six o'clock this morning and she's not coming back."

"I'm damned glad to hear it," Shayne told him sincerely. "I confess I was plenty worried when I walked out of her room last night."

"God, what a narrow escape she had," breathed Paul feelingly. "Believe me, I read the riot act to her after she told me what she had done."

"Marry her right away," Shayne advised him. "She's past eighteen and doesn't need her guardian's consent. Whether you think you've got enough money or not. You'll get by somehow."

"That's exactly what we're going to do. That's what I told her."

Shayne felt vastly relieved when he strode out of the Dolphin bar a few minutes later. The girl had used good sense, he thought, in not telling her young man the full truth about Henderson and her sexual involvement. Paul Winterbottom didn't appear to have the broadest shoulders in the world, but he seemed a nice enough fellow and genuinely in love with the girl. It was too bad, of course, that something couldn't be done about Henderson, but he didn't see how it could be accomplished without involving the girl. For that reason he decided to say nothing to Tim Rourke about no longer wanting to meet the man.

It was the next day when Timothy Rourke called to say that Shayne and Lucy were invited to cocktails at the Henderson house that afternoon. When Shayne asked if he'd had any trouble wangling the invitation, Rourke laughed shortly and said, "It was the other way around. In fact, it was Henderson himself who brought your name up while I was casting about for some way to get you together."

Shayne said wonderingly, "Henderson mentioned my name out of a clear sky?"

"That's right. I called to suggest I might interview him on his political prospects, and we made an appointment. Then, before I could say anything else he sort of gushed, 'By the way, you're quite friendly with Michael Shayne aren't you? The private detective.' When I coyly confessed that we were practically on a first-name basis, he said he admired hell out

of you and always had wanted to meet you. I told him it wasn't difficult if he had the price of a drink on him, and he wondered out loud if you'd like to drop in for cocktails this evening, and I accepted for both of us."

"And Lucy?"

"And Lucy. He said there isn't any Mrs. Shayne is there, and I told him no but you had a beautiful secretary with two hollow legs. He thought that was very funny indeed and insisted that you must bring her. Pick me up at my place a little before six."

THE HENDERSON house was a modern one-story structure directly on the ocean at the far northern end of Miami Beach. There were already half a dozen cars parked in the circular drive in front of the ranch house when Shayne turned in at six-thirty.

From an archway on the right as they entered flowed a loud babble of voices and laughter and the welcoming click of ice in glasses.

The maid smilingly took the men's hats and they passed her to enter a large square room that held twelve or fifteen people in three groups, all with glasses in their hands and seemingly all talking at once.

Saul Henderson detached himself from the group nearest the entrance as they hesitated there. Shayne recognized him at once from his newspaper picture, and immediately disliked him more in the flesh than he had in his thoughts. He was of medium height with thinning dark hair, and he carried his forty-odd years with a youthful bounce that somehow managed to be irritating to the redhead.

He had an ingratiating smile that was almost effusive as he advanced with outstretched hand and exclaimed, "Mr. Rourke. How delightful that you could come. And in such charming company." He pumped Rourke's hand and beamed at Lucy Hamilton as the reporter introduced her, and then took Shayne's hand firmly and squeezed it a little harder than was necessary.

"Come and get a drink, all three of you," he said. "And then meet my guests who are all anxious to shake your hand."

He took Lucy's arm and led them to a small bar set up at the rear of the room that was presided over by a colored man in a white jacket and said hopefully, "A sidecar, Miss Hamilton? Or don't you go along with your employer's choice of cocktails?"

She said, "Oh, but I do. Michael would fire me if I dared order anything else," and Shayne stood by sardonically while the waiter efficiently mixed a shaker of excellent sidecars and filled two tall-stemmed glasses.

Timothy Rourke, Shayne discovered without a lot of surprise,

had expertly corralled the prettiest female at the party (if you excluded Lucy) and had her blocked off in a corner of the room where he was leering at her happily and working on his third highball while he heartily agreed with her that newspaper reporters were, indeed, a daredevil and fascinating lot.

Bored by it all, and again wondering why Henderson had so obviously wanted to meet him, Shayne wandered back to the bar and secured another sidecar, then found a comfortable chair in a deserted corner of the room and sank into it gratefully, lighting a cigarette and half-closing his eyes, making his mind as blank as possible so that the waves of sound from the throats of the score or more of people in the room flowed over and through him without making direct contact.

He had been sitting like that for a few minutes when he straightened in his chair with a tingle in his spine as he saw a lone latecomer being ushered through the archway by the maid.

It was Hilda Gleason. She was dressed exactly as he had seen her before, wearing the tinted Harlequin glasses that made her look younger and less sophisticated than she was without them.

Shayne took a deep, disbelieving drag on his cigarette and held his hand up to hide the lower portion of his face while she stood just inside the archway and her gaze moved around from one group to another in the room. It moved over him without recognition, he thought, though it was difficult to tell with those glasses on, and then she smiled and moved forward gracefully as Saul Henderson went hurriedly to greet her with outstretched hand.

From his position across the room, Shayne could hear nothing they said as they stood together for a moment chatting like old friends. Then Henderson took her arm and led her toward the bar and Shayne wondered if she would ask for a stinger.

What was Hilda Gleason doing here at Henderson's party? It made absolutely no sense if you believed the story she had told him a few evenings ago. Could she possibly have managed to identify Jane Smith as Henderson's step-daughter, and thus come here to try and find out something about her husband?

Shayne didn't see how she could have managed that. The girl had checked out of the hotel before Hilda came to him, and left for New York the next morning.

He kept his hand up in front of his face, broodingly sucking on his cigarette while he watched Henderson get her a cocktail at the bar (a stinger, no less, if the liqueur in the squat bottle was crême de menthe as Shayne sus-

pected) and lead her to a group nearby and start introducing her to other guests.

He stayed in his chair removed from the others, watching Henderson take Hilda from group to group, getting the distinct impression that she was a stranger to the others and meeting all of them for the first time.

When they finally turned toward his corner of the room, Shayne mashed his cigarette out and got to his feet, grimly studying Hilda's face as she was led nearer by Henderson, striving to guess whether she was as surprised by his presence as he was by hers.

Those damned glasses made it difficult. He had never before realized just how important a woman's eyes were in helping a man judge her inner feelings. Certainly, she dissembled well if she was surprised and disconcerted to see him.

There was an interested smile on her full lips and the bluish blankness of her glasses to conceal what she really felt when Henderson said, "Mrs. Moran. It's an honor to present Mr. Shayne. Michael Shayne. One of the most famous private detectives in the country, if you don't already know."

"But, of course, I have heard of Michael Shayne." She extended her hand and gripped his firmly, held it for an extra squeeze which he interpreted as a signal for him to pretend not to recognize her.

Shayne said very formally, "I'm delighted to meet you. I was just sitting here waiting for you to show up."

"So?" She wrinkled her forehead charmingly. "How could that be?"

"Very simple. You are an extremely beautiful woman without an escort, and my date has deserted me. Do you mind being the perfect host, Henderson, and leaving us alone to get better acquainted?"

He reached for the arm that Henderson was clutching, and deliberately pulled her away and stepped aside so she could sit in the chair he had been occupying. Henderson was unable to conceal a flicker of irritation that crossed his face.

In a low harsh voice, Shayne said, "Take your glasses off, Hilda."

The tip of her tongue came out to wet her lips. She reached up obediently and removed her Harlequin glasses. There was animal fright in her luminous brown eyes.

"Why are you here, Michael Shayne?"

"I was invited. Why are you here?"

"I, too, was invited." She lifted one hand appealingly toward him as he stood over her, blocking her off from the rest of the room. "Have you . . . found any trace

of Harry in the city?" she asked.

"No. Have you?"

Pain clouded her eyes as she moved her head slowly from side to side. "Nothing. But I am a stranger here and I do not know how to proceed."

"You don't appear to be a complete stranger to Henderson."

"I will explain that later." She looked past him and sat up straight in her chair, taking a sip from her cocktail. In a fuller-bodied voice, she declared, "I think that would be most pleasant, Mr. Shayne. After the party is over, then?"

Henderson's voice intruded just behind Shayne. "Just the sort of thing I've always heard about you private eyes. Leave you alone for one minute with a beautiful woman and you end up with an assignation."

Shayne said, "Do you mind?"

"Of course I mind. But I don't see what I can do about it. Now that you've got that settled, Shayne, would you mind awfully stepping inside my office with me? I've a matter of extreme importance to discuss with you."

"You will excuse me?" Hilda was on her feet and moving away from them before Shayne could reply.

Then he said flatly, "My office hours are nine to five. Make an appointment with Miss Hamilton."

"This is off the record, Shayne. I need professional advice."

"Do you invite your doctor to a party to get a free prescription from him?" Shayne's face remained expressionless, but his voice was intentionally insolent.

"See here, Shayne." Henderson stopped and controlled himself with obvious effort. He smiled thinly and his voice became placating. "I understand, of course, and I'll be happy to pay your fee for any professional advice you give me. What is your regular charge for a consultation?"

Shayne drained his glass and said, "I think another sidecar will cover it." He stood up and Henderson stepped aside, followed close behind him to the bar where the waiter smilingly emptied the contents of the shaker into Shayne's outheld glass.

Saul Henderson murmured, "This way, if you don't mind," and went to a closed door beyond the bar which he opened and held for the detective to walk past him.

VII

BEYOND THE DOOR was a small den, efficiently equipped with a desk, portable typewriter on a wheeled stand, and filing cabinets.

Shayne went in and set his cocktail glass on the desk. He got out a cigarette and lit it while his host closed the door and sat down in front of the desk with a deep sigh. Shyane looked down at him

quizzically, then pulled up a straight chair and also sat down.

"Let me say first, Mr. Shayne, that it's like Providence," Henderson said, "having you here to talk to. I had a curious feeling that fate was taking a hand when your reporter friend called me out of the blue this morning. It came to me like a flash that you were exactly the man for me to confide in."

Shayne said placidly, "That's very flattering." He drank half his sidecar and set the glass down. "Shall we skip the pleasantries and get down to business?"

"It's just that I . . . it's so difficult to know where to begin."

"Try the beginning."

"Yes . . . well . . . I'm frightened, Mr. Shayne. In deathly fear for my life. Two attempts have been made to murder me in the last few days." His voice quavered. "I need . . . protection."

"Go to the police. That's their job."

"Naturally, I have been to the police. I reported each attempt on my life immediately. They made a cursory investigation of course, and then came up with the bright idea that they could have both been accidents. Wholly coincidental, of course, that the two attempts occurred within three days of each other."

Shayne emptied his glass and twirled it about reflectively by its long stem. "Tell me about them."

"The first was last Monday. At dusk when I was driving home for dinner. I was just turning in my driveway when I heard the crack of a shot and a bullet embedded itself in the seat upholstery not more than an inch from my right shoulder."

"You didn't see anyone?"

"Naturally not. It was beginning dusk and I simply stepped on the gas and roared up the drive. I hurried inside and called the police to report it. A couple of stupid detectives came around eventually. They dug the bullet out and made some wild guesses about distance and muzzle velocity and so forth, and then said probably it was just some juvenile delinquent firing a rifle wildly into the air."

"And the second one?"

"Yesterday afternoon. I have a Chriscraft twenty-footer in my boathouse which I often take out alone for a spin on a calm day. I thoroughly enjoy heading directly out to sea and being alone with the salt sea spray and the sun and the roar of a powerful motor in my ears. Yesterday afternoon I was at least four miles out when the motor exploded. There was a terrific roar and a blinding flash of flame and everything went up in pieces. The entire hull was torn apart and it sank in a matter of minutes."

"Luckily I escaped injury and was able to leap overboard into

the water. I'm a very poor swimmer and could not possibly have remained afloat more than a few minutes, so whoever planned it had the expectation that if the explosion did not kill me I would almost surely drown."

"But you didn't."

"But I didn't. By an absolute miracle there was a fishing boat not more than five hundred yards away. The only craft within miles of me. They rescued me and brought me in safely."

"And the police think that was an accident too?"

"They insist that it *could* have been easily enough. A spark from the engine igniting the gasoline tank. I explained it wasn't that *sort* of explosion. That it was definitely a bomb of some sort. But I haven't any rppof. Just my own positive impression of what happened. And there's no chance of recovering the boat to ever find out what caused it."

"But coupled with the bullet on Monday, you're convinced that someone is out to get you?"

"Aren't you?"

Shyane shrugged his wide shoulders. "Not convinced. I certainly agree that the law of probabilities is being stretched pretty thin if we accept them both as coincidences. What does Petey Painter think?" he ended blandly.

"Painter!" Saul Henderson spit out the word as though he had bit into a worm. "I talked to him all right. Insisted that he see me when they tried to put me off with an inspector or something. Well, you know Peter Painter better than I do. Strutting little nincompoop. He sat in his office and smirked and gloated. He knows, of course, that he's one of the first men on the Beach slated to go when the Reform Administration takes over after the next election. His department is riddled with graft, and people are sick and tired of the highhanded way he runs things."

"And he knows you're to be candidate for mayor on the ticket opposing the present administration?"

"It isn't definite yet. I haven't been offered the nomination."

"But it's generally known that you will be," Shayne pressed him.

"It's fairly common knowledge, yes." Henderson compressed his thin lips and frowned across the desk at the redhead.

Shayne leaned forward to mash out his cigarette butt, lifted his empty glass hopefully. "I seem to have run out of my consultation fee."

Henderson took the glass and got up with a wintry smile. "I'll have to do something about that."

Shayne leaned back and watched him go out the door with bleak eyes. For the first time in his life, the redhead had a warmly fraternal feeling for Peter Painter. Even without benefit of Shayne's

private knowledge of Henderson's real character, the cocky little detective chief was right on the ball this time. And this was one time Shayne had no intention of getting into the act on the opposite side from Painter.

Help Henderson stay alive so he could be elected mayor of Miami Beach? God forbid!

Nothing of this showed on Shayne's face when his host reentered with a brimming glass for him. Shayne accepted it with a grunt that might be construed as thanks, and took a careful sip while Henderson settled himself back into his chair.

Then he asked abruptly, "Who's gunning for you, Henderson?"

He drew in a deep breath and held it for a long time. Then he expelled it unhappily and said, "So far as I know I haven't an enemy in the world. That's what makes all this so utterly fantastic." His lips tightened. "There is one thing I haven't told you, Mr. Shayne. One thing I didn't tell Painter and couldn't possibly tell him. But I feel I can confide in you. This talk has given me the utmost confidence that you are a man of discretion and honor.

"There is this letter, Mr. Shayne. I received it this morning from New York." He reached down and pulled open a drawer of the desk, lifted out a red and white striped envelope which he looked down at with fear and loathing.

"I almost threw it away at the time. When you read it you'll understand why. I still don't believe a word of it," he went on forcibly. "It is still utterly inconceivable to me how it came to be written. There cannot possibly be a word of truth in the filthy thing. And yet . . . and yet . . . after what happened yesterday I just don't know. I just—don't—know," he repeated slowly and fearfully.

"Here." He held it across the desk to Shayne as though it were a time bomb about to explode. "You'll have to read it for yourself. There's no other way. But as God is my judge, I swear there is no reason on earth why my stepdaughter should wish me dead."

Shayne took the airmail envelope and looked at it. The address was a penciled scrawl, *Mr. Saul Henderson, Palm Tree Drive, Miami Beach, Fla.* It was postmarked New York the previous day.

Shayne opened the flap and took out a single sheet of folded cheap paper. The message was penciled in the same handwriting as the address:

Dear Sir,

This is a friendly warning to say that your step-daughter is going around offering fifty grand to get you bumped off.

I ain't a killer an turned her down cold but other guys wont. Watch your step.

A friend

Shayne sat looking down at the note for a long time after he finished reading it. No matter what she had promised Paul Winterbottom, her fiance, she hadn't wasted any time getting in touch with the criminal element in the big city.

He carefully refolded the single sheet into its original creases and replaced it in the envelope. He dropped it on the desk in front of him and looked up to meet Henderson's tortured eyes. He said, "You didn't show this to Painter?"

"How could I? My God, Shayne! Don't you understand? My own step-daughter threatening me. Don't you see what a field day Painter would have with that? What political capital he could make out of it?"

"Tell me about your step-daughter," Shayne said. "Muriel Graham? Is that her name?"

"Muriel, yes. A sweet and wonderful girl. Like my own daughter, Shayne. I always think of her that way. And I think she loves me as a father. Her mother was quite ill for years as you may know, and Muriel and I were extremely close."

"You can't possibly have an idea that maybe Muriel *has* hired somebody to kill you?" The accidents' you mentioned—"

"No. No!" Henderson pounded the desk angrily with his fist. "Nothing on earth would ever make me believe that. But I am inclining to the belief that the letter isn't a practical joke. That it has *some* basis, though what it is I can't even imagine."

"I'd still like to know more about your step-daugher. How old was she when you married her mother?"

"That was four years ago. She was almost sixteen."

"Was her mother an invalid at the time?"

"When we were married? No. She was in poor health, but her ailment hadn't been properly diagnosed. None of us guessed that it was cancer. I insisted that she see the best specialists, but by then it was too late to operate. She took to her bed and all of us did our poor best to see that she was comfortable and happy until the end."

"When your step-daughter was sixteen."

"Yes. Muriel would have been sixteen."

"A beautiful girl," Shayne said quietly. "On the brink of maturity. Did it ever enter your thoughts, Henderson, that the daughter might become a substitute for the mother? The two of you were living together in the same house. You, a young man for your years, deprived of the companionship of a wife, living

on intimate terms with a young and unawakened girl . . .”

“Stop it, Shayne? Stop it this instant.” Henderson’s face was congested. His doubled fist pounded the desk loudly. “Of all the filthy ideas I ever heard in my life—” He paused, breathing loudly and hard, glaring across at the detective. “What sort of cesspool do you have for a mind?”

Shayne shrugged and stood up.

With an effort Henderson forced himself to speak calmly. “Will you take the case, Shayne? I’ll overlook what you just said. I can’t believe you really meant it.”

“I wouldn’t touch it with a ten-foot pole.”

“You wouldn’t . . . *what?* What did you say, Shayne?”

“I won’t waste time repeating myself,” said Shayne harshly. “When you eat dinner tonight, start wondering if poison will be next. Every time you start to cross a street on foot remember how simple it is to commit homicide by automobile. Lock all the windows when you go to bed at night, and bar all the doors. Fire your present servants and hire some new ones whom you believe to be incorruptible. Change all of your regular habits of life and stay away from crowds and places where you’re known. That’s my advice to you. Don’t trust anyone behind your back. Not ever again. It won’t do any good in the long run, but it’ll be something to occupy your mind while you’re still alive.”

He started to turn away, then swung back to demand, “How well do you know Hilda?”

“Hilda . . . ?” The abrupt transition threw Henderson momentarily off balance. Then he cleared his throat. “You mean the last lady I introduced you to? Mrs. Moran?”

“I mean the gal in the cute glasses. Whatever her name is. How long have you known her?”

“What earthly affair is that of yours, Shayne?”

“I’m making it my affair. How well do you know her?”

“Not well at all. I met her only yesterday as a matter of fact.”

“How?”

“How what?”

“How did you meet her. What were the circumstances?”

“She came into my office to discuss a matter of disposing of some bonds. She is recently widowed, I believe, and not accustomed to dealing with financial matters.”

“So you invited her to drop in for cocktails today?” Shayne asked scathingly.

“I did, yes.”

“You don’t invite all your new clients in for cocktails, do you?”

“All of my new clients aren’t attractive widows alone in the city. I resent your questioning me, Shayne.”

Shayne said, “That makes me feel good,” and stalked out, clos-

ing the door firmly behind him.

In the other room he found the party in the process of breaking up, and was unable to spot Hilda among those remaining. Lucy Hamilton and Timothy Rourke were together near the archway, and Lucy brightened up when he emerged.

"We're ready to leave, Michael. Is our host coming out so we can thank him?"

Shayne said, "I don't know. What happened to the gal in the red dress and the cute glasses?"

Timothy Rourke said, "She beat it the moment you and Henderson went out. What did you say to frighten her, Mike? I saw you had her cornered for a time."

Shayne said, "I'll tell you about it later." He took them both firmly by the arm. "Let's go."

"But shouldn't we wait to say goodbye to Mr. Henderson?" protested Lucy.

Shayne said, "I don't think we need to bother," and dragged them through the archway.

Driving back to Miami, Shayne remained silent and brooding behind the wheel while Lucy and Tim lightly discussed inconsequentials. Both were familiar with his moods and knew when he wanted to be left alone. When they reached the mainland, he suggested they all have dinner together, and they both agreed. Without consulting them, Shayne chose the Chantecler Restaurant near the western end of the Causeway, and he remained sitting behind the wheel while they got out in front of it.

"Go in and get a table, Tim," he decided abruptly. "Order Lucy a drink and be nice to her. I've an errand that won't take me long."

Lucy started to protest, but Shayne put the car in gear and drove away. He located the street address Hilda Gleason had given him without difficulty a few blocks from the Chantecler. It was a two-story stucco house in a neighborhood of old houses that had been mostly converted into apartments and rooming houses. He went in and climbed one flight of stairs and found a door numbered five.

He knocked on it loudly and repeatedly without getting any answer. As he was turning away, a door on the other side of the hall opened and a blowsy-looking blonde was framed in the opening with bright light behind her outlining a heavy torso and bulky limbs through a thin nylon dressing gown.

She said a trifle thickly, "She ain't at home, redhead. But if you want some fun come on over with me."

Shayne said pleasantly, "Some other time, Right now, I've got a yen for women wearing Harlequin glasses."

He went down the stairs and out to his car, wondering more

and more about Hilda Gleason. True, she had admitted she had sought cheap lodgings in Miami, but that didn't make it essential that she should end up in that kind of establishment. It was just one more thing to wonder about her.

VIII

THE BEDSIDE TELEPHONE awakened Shayne from deep and dreamless sleep. He reached out and fumbled for it in the darkness, got it to his ear and said, "Hello," into the mouthpiece.

Timothy Rourke's voice said, "There's been a killing at Henderson's house, Mike."

Shayne muttered, "So they got the guy. Why bother me about it?"

"Not Henderson. He did the shooting."

Shayne came fully awake and sat up in bed. "Shot who?"

"I don't know any details." But I'm headed over there and thought you might like in on it."

Shayne said, "I'll see you there." He tossed back the covers and turned on a light. It was 2:18 in the morning. He threw on clothes swiftly, and was out of the apartment in three minutes.

Twenty minutes later he slowed to make the turn into Henderson's driveway. There were police cars in front of the house, and an ambulance with a spotlight

bathing the front of the house in brilliant white light.

Shayne parked directly behind Rourke's battered coupé and went up to a cluster of men about the body of a man crumpled on the porch just in front of the door. He lay on his back with sightless eyes staring up into the light. His lower jaw was smashed by the bullet that had killed him. He was clean-shaven, with a hawk-like face and a very high forehead. He wore a blue and white checkered sport shirt, buttoned at the throat with no tie, an almost new green suede jacket, and dark trousers that needed pressing. His black shoes were scuffed and had been resoled.

Timothy Rourke stood just inside the doorway, making notes on a wad of copy-paper with his ear cocked to overhear conversation inside the house while he gazed down at the dead man.

One of the Beach detectives officiously started to shove Shayne back, and Rourke looked up and said loudly, "You're being paged inside, Shayne. Henderson was going to phone you until I told him you were already on your way."

Shayne nodded and pushed past the detective, who gave way reluctantly. He stepped over the dead man onto the threshold and glanced past Rourke into the hallway where a patrolman stood outside the archway, and asked in a low voice, "What gives?"

"Painter is inside with Henderson. The press is excluded and they won't talk loud enough for me to catch more than half what they're saying. Get in there and pitch, Mike."

The detective grinned briefly and went toward the uniformed man who moved to bar his entrance to the room. Shayne stopped in front of him where he could see Saul Henderson and Peter Painter standing face to face in the center of the room where the party had been held that evening. He didn't look at the cop, but called out, "Did you want me, Henderson?"

Henderson wore a maroon silk dressing gown and bedroom slippers, and his hair was dishevelled. He jerked his head around and said gladly, "Indeed I do want you, Shayne. Come right in."

The cop stepped out of his way and Shayne went through the archway, grinning at the Miami Beach Detective Chief who glared venomously back at him.

He said, "Congratulations, Chief. This is one time you got on the scene ahead of me."

"And I don't need you messing into this case, Shayne. You can have a talk with your client after I've finished questioning him about this homicide."

Shayne started to say that Henderson wasn't his client, but de-

cided to let it ride. He lounged forward and said, "I'll stick around until you're through if you don't mind?"

"Suppose I do mind?" Painter demanded aggressively. He was a small man with glistening black hair and a very thin, very black mustache, impeccably dressed and groomed even at this hour of the morning.

Shayne said, "I'll still stick around." He sank into a deep chair and got out a cigarette. "Go right ahead and interrogate the suspect. That is, if Henderson is the suspect."

"Suspect isn't the word," snapped Painter. "He admits shooting the man down on his doorstep."

"In self-defense," said Henderson quickly. "I told you that he snatched a gun from his pocket as soon as I opened the door."

"I know you told me. Prove it."

"The pistol was lying right there beside his hand. I don't know how competent your fingerprint men are, but they must have found his prints on it."

Painter didn't admit or deny the fact. He said, "You admit you came to the door prepared to kill whoever was there."

"I admit nothing of the sort," said Henderson hotly. "A man has a right to defend his own home and person."

"You went to that door with a loaded and cocked pistol in your hand," said Painter waspishly. "You claim you had no idea who was ringing your doorbell at that time of night, yet you armed yourself before going to the door. That looks like premeditation to me."

"I didn't know who it was. I still don't know. I never saw the man before in my life."

"Most people don't carry a cocked and loaded pistol with them to answer their own doorbell."

"Most people haven't had two attempts made on their lives in the past few days," retorted Henderson.

"Oh, yes," murmured Painter, delicately smoothing his mustache with a thumbnail. "We come back to that, of course. But I'm not at all convinced those were actual attempts on your life, you know. In fact, you could easily have engineered both of them yourself. There's no proof you didn't."

He appealed directly to Shayne, his enmity in momentary abeyance. "I've known some pretty devious murderers in the past. Isn't that so, Shayne? Doesn't this setup look phony to you?"

Shayne waved his cigarette lazily. "Sure. I'll buy it. All you have to do is turn up a strong enough motive for Henderson wanting the man dead."

"We'll probably get that as soon as we identify him."

"For God's sake, Shayne," protested Henderson despairfully. "You can't be serious about accepting Painter's fantastic theory. The reason I wanted you to come here to testify that you had pertinent information indicating that someone is definitely out to kill me."

"You mean the letter you showed me this afternoon?"

"Exactly."

"What's that about a letter?" snapped Painter.

"An anonymous letter threatening my life," said Henderson hastily with a warning look and a shake of his head at Shayne. "Mr. Shayne can testify that he read it this afternoon."

"And you withheld it from the police? It's a felony to withhold evidence in a homicide."

"But it wasn't a homicide this afternoon," protested Henderson weakly. "It was just proof that those were real attempts on my life."

"It's homicide now," said Painter stiffly. "Let's have the letter. If the dead man wrote it, it may clear you of suspicion."

"I . . . I destroyed it after showing it to Mr. Shayne."

"You destroyed it, eh?" Painter rocked forward happily on his toes. "*Why*, may I ask?"

"Because . . . well, I just didn't think it was important any more. Mr. Shayne did read it and he can swear to its existence."

"Can you, Shayne?"

"I can. I'm not at all sure that I will."

"What do you mean by that crack?"

"Just what I said."

"I don't like your attitude." Painter strutted forward with his chin thrust out aggressively, both hands planted on his hips. "If you can throw any light on this affair, it's your duty to do so."

Shayne said pleasantly, "I'm afraid I don't see it that way."

Painter glared at him. "Some character comes ringing his doorbell at two o'clock in the morning, and because he's nervous and frightened, he arms himself before going to the door. Whereupon the man pulls a gun, and he's lucky enough to shoot first. Is that the picture, Henderson?"

"That's it exactly. I never saw the man before . . . haven't the faintest idea who he is."

"So why don't you quit barking up that tree, Painter, and start finding out who wants Henderson dead . . . and why? If the dead man is just a hired hand, the chances are this won't be the end of it."

"Hired gunmen," said Painter stiffly, "don't generally go out on jobs with a twenty-two automatic."

"That what he was carrying?"

Painter nodded. "Henderson, on the other hand, was equipped with a forty-five. Made it sort of

unequal. Have you got a permit for that cannon?" he added abruptly, turning away from Shayne.

"Certainly. Issued by your own police department. Does the dead man have a permit for his gun?" he probed acidly.

Painter said, "We're checking the serial number." He rocked forward on his toes and then teetered back on his heels. "Right now, Henderson, I want to question the other members of the household."

"There is no one else."

"You telling me you don't have any servants with a layout like this?" Painter looked about the room appraisingly.

"There's a regular housekeeper and a maid, of course," Henderson told him stiffly. "But neither of them sleep in."

"So there's no one except you who can say what went on here tonight?"

"I don't concede that my word needs verification."

"I know you're a widower," Shayne put in. "But isn't there a grown daughter, Henderson?"

Henderson looked at him angrily for bringing the subject up, but said, "A step-daughter. She's out of town at present."

"Where?" Shayne pressed him.

"In New York."

"I think you should get her back here," Shayne said.

"I don't see why. She's been gone for days and can't possibly have any knowledge of this affair."

Painter swung back to Henderson. "Do you expect me to believe that a complete stranger just wandered up here to your front door by the purest chance . . . armed with an automatic pistol which he drew the moment you opened the door. If this was the third attempt on your life, it's self-evident that you do have an enemy who wants you dead. If you can't throw any light on that, we'll have to go to the people closest to you. Your step-daughter is certainly the most logical person to question on that point."

A detective came hesitantly through the archway and said, "If you've got a minute, Chief . . ."

"I'm through here." Painter faced Henderson again and told him, "I'm not arresting you . . . yet. But don't try to leave town, and get your step-daughter back here in the morning." He turned and went away stiffly on hard heels.

Henderson turned to Shayne, mopping perspiration from his face. "Why did you bring Muriel into this? It was entirely your doing. If you hadn't mentioned her name, Painter would never have thought of questioning her."

Shayne said, "Because I'd like to ask her some questions myself, and Painter has the facilities for

locating her which I don't. I didn't appreciate the way you tried to use me to pull your chestnuts out of the fire tonight," he went on harshly.

"You're not my client and I had no moral obligation to conceal the fact that the letter you showed me this afternoon positively named your step-daughter as the instigator of the attempts against you. If that dead man on your doorstep was hired by her, she's the one who's really responsible for his death. Damn it, Henderson," he went on angrily, "don't you realize that every bit of dirty linen in a man's life comes out in a homicide investigation? This thing may look cut and dried to you, but Painter is a stubborn cuss when he gets started and he won't stop digging until he finds a motive. If your step-daughter has a secret motive for hating you, you'd better spill it to me right now. I might be able to do something for her if I know the truth before Painter has a chance to dig it out."

"But I swear as God is my judge that there's nothing, Shayne. It's not that I'm afraid to have her questioned, it's just that the publicity will ruin me politically and socially if such rumors ever get out."

Shayne said, "This is your last chance to come clean with me before I walk out of here and start doing some digging of my own."

"But I have nothing more to tell you."

"Then it's your funeral," Shayne said with a disgusted snort.

He turned and stalked out.

IX

THE FIRST FAINT streaks of dawn were breaking in the sky behind him when Shayne pulled off the Causeway onto the mainland and drove directly to the same two-story stucco house he had visited earlier that same night. The street was deserted and no lights showed in any houses of the block as he pulled in to the curb.

He got out and went up the walk to the front door, found it unlocked and entered a small hall where he groped around and found a light switch. A forty-watt bulb overhead lighted the hallway and the flight of stairs leading up. He climbed the stairs quietly, not tiptoeing but avoiding unnecessary sound. The upper hall was faintly illuminated from the light below, and he went directly to number 5 where he knocked lightly. There was complete silence in the old house as he waited. He tried the doorknob when there was no response, and found it locked as he expected.

He knocked again, longer and more loudly, and was rewarded

by the creak of bedsprings inside the room. Then Hilda's voice, slurred with sleep, came from beyond the locked door, "Who is it?"

"Mike Shayne." He kept his own voice low, but loud enough to penetrate the thin wooden panel. "Open up."

He heard a click, and light showed around the door casing. There was silence and a momentary wait, and he could envision Hilda Gleason (or was it really Moran?) standing on the other side of the door trying to make up her mind whether to unlock it for him or not.

Then he heard the click of a latch, and the door opened wide. Without makeup, Hilda's face was white and strained. Her light brown hair was straggly, and her eyes were round and frightened. She was barefooted and wore a shabby, light flannel robe which she clutched tightly together in front, and the two-inch hem of a white nylon nightgown showed around the bottom of it.

She said, "What is it? I was sound asleep when you knocked. It must be very late."

"It's practically morning." There was a double bed, one upholstered chair and one straight chair in the room. Her Angora jacket was draped carefully on the back of the big chair, and there was a brassière and garterbelt on one arm of it.

Shayne turned to gather them up and put them on the straight chair. With his back to her, he said casually, "Why don't you get back into bed? We have a lot of talking to do."

"Have we, Mr. Shayne?" He sank down into the chair while she settled herself near the head of the bed with both pillows propped up behind her, a sheet and coverlet modestly pulled up to her waist.

"Where have you been tonight?"

"Asleep."

"I came by to see you after I left Henderson's, but you weren't in."

"Then it was you my neighbor across the hall described so glowingly." The hint of a smile dimpled her face, and then a faint blush crept over it and she dropped her eyes from his direct gaze. "I assure you I did not know exactly about the girls who live here when I took this room. But then it didn't seem to matter because I didn't expect visitors."

Shayne lit a cigarette and settled back to watch her through hooded eyes. "Why were you at Henderson's this afternoon?"

"But I have told you. To attend the party."

"Is your name Gleason or Moran?"

She sighed. "It is Gleason."

"Why did you go to Henderson's office as Mrs. Moran and

strike up an acquaintanceship with him."

"I think . . . I will have to tell you the truth, Mr. Shayne."

"I think you had better."

"Would you tell me first why *you* think it is important? What *you* were doing at Henderson's yourself."

He said, "Don't you know that Jane Smith is Henderson's step-daughter?"

"Jane Smith?" Somehow he couldn't believe that her complete-surprise could possibly be faked. She stared at him in utter astonishment. "You mean the one in the bar that night? The one I saw with Harry at home before he came here?"

Shayne nodded. "That same girl. Who called herself Jane Smith to me. You didn't know?"

"That she was Mr. Henderson's *step-daughter?* But no. How could I guess that? Even though I did see her driving from that house . . ." She caught in her breath and her lower lip, and managed to look like a small and contritely guilty child. "I have lied to you, Mr. Shayne. I did not see her by accident on the street. I was in a taxicab going slowly past the Henderson house when she drove out from it. I had my taxi follow her to that hotel, and the rest is as I told you."

"Why did you lie about that part of it?"

"Because I did not want . . . I did not think I should tell you I had been watching the Henderson house."

Shayne said, "Start at the beginning and tell me the truth this time."

"Yes. I think I must do that now. It was only a little untruth I told. I thought perhaps . . . to protect Harry."

"From what?"

"If . . . something should happen to Mr Henderson. Nothing has happened to him, has it?"

Shayne said, "Nothing has happened to Henderson yet. I'm waiting for the truth, Hilda."

"Yes. It was when it first began with Harry. Two months ago. We were watching the television that evening on Harry's night off. There was a program from Miami. Comedians and stars, and a lot of important people in Miami. And there was this one famous comedian who was getting the key to Miami Beach presented to him. I was not paying much attention when Harry sat up straight and said out loud, 'Why, that ugly son!'

"And on the screen was Mr. Henderson making a speech. And I said to Harry, "Who? What do you mean?' and he said, 'I mean that man standing up in front of the camera shooting off his big mouth, that's what. Henderson, hell!' Harry went on, and I never saw him so angry.

'His name isn't Henderson any more than mine is. My God, what I know about that dirty skunk! Did you hear them say something about him getting elected mayor of Miami Beach, Hilda?' he asked me. 'My God, if that's not something. Mayor, no less.'

She wet her lips.

"And I didn't know what he was talking about, you understand, Mr. Shayne? And, by that time, there was a singer and an orchestra on the program and I asked him what he meant by it all, but he wouldn't tell me. He just said it was better I didn't know and he didn't want to talk about it any more. But that was the beginning. Harry was changed after that night. He never mentioned Mr. Henderson's name again and flew into a rage when I begged him to tell me. But he began brooding and talking about injustice and how life wasn't fair to some people, and how terrible that we should be poor when others that deserved to be shot were living off the fat of the land."

"And you knew he was referring to Henderson when he talked that way."

"I knew it in my own mind, yes. But he would not say so. And then the girl came one night like I told you, and everything else was just as I said."

"Except that you didn't admit to me that you knew his trip to Miami had some connection with Henderson?"

"That is right. That is all I told wrong. And how I saw the girl you say is Mr. Henderson's step-daughter."

"And you decided to go to Henderson yourself day before yesterday? Using an assumed name."

"I was afraid to say I was Mrs. Gleason. I thought I might learn something about Harry. It was all I could do."

Shayne mashed out his cigarette and sat back, tugging at his earlobe. He believed Hilda was telling the truth now. But what did it mean? Somehow, he was now positive that the dead man he had seen on Henderson's doorstep was her husband. He hated like hell to tell her so, but he knew it had to be done. But before doing so and while she was still calm and composed, he tried to pry further information from her.

"Going back to that first evening while you and your husband were watching TV. You're sure he said, 'His name is no more Henderson than mine is?" Those were his exact words?"

"He said that, yes."

"And he mentioned knowing something bad about him?"

"Very bad, I think. From the way he spoke."

"When and where do you

think he had known Henderson under a different name?"

"I do not know. I was before I met Harry, I am sure of that."

"When did you first meet your husband?"

"Ten years ago. In Algonquin, where I was born. He came and went to work as a bartender."

"What do you know about his past life?"

"Very little." She sighed and fingered the edge of the coverlet at her waist nervously. "He did not like to talk about before he met me."

"Did you ever have the impression he had a reason not to talk about his past? That he had something to hide?"

"Mr. Shayne. I have thought that, yes." Tears brimmed in her eyes. "I did not care. I did not press to know. We were in love and our marriage was good. I did not wish to know the past. The present was all I thought or cared about."

Shayne straightened in his chair restively and shook out a cigarette. "Did your husband own a pistol, Hilda?"

"Never. He was not a man who believed in violence."

Shayne said, "I want all of the truth now, Hilda. You lied to me about not finding your husband in Miami. You did find him. Where? When?"

"That was when I first came," she faltered. "On Monday afternoon. He had written in his note the name of that bar where he had met an old friend—the Lucky Tiger Bar. But I swear he would not tell me where was staying here. And I did not see him again after ten o'clock that night when he walked out the door very angry because I had begged him to return with me and give up whatever crazy plan he had."

"What time did you reach Miami Monday?"

"The bus arrived at four o'clock. I had only the name of the bar to find him and I went straight there. Harry was drinking beer and he was angry to see me, thinking me still at home. We sat in a booth until ten o'clock that night and he drank beer and was drunker than I have ever seen him.

"He would not tell me anything, Mr. Shayne, except that I must leave him alone and we would be rich. It was going just as he planned, he told me, and I must not interfere. I begged him and I cried, but it only made him angrier, and he stalked out cursing me." There were tears streaming down her cheeks when she finished, and she put her hands over her face to hide them.

"Why didn't you tell me this before?"

"What good was it to tell? I was so ashamed, and I still did

not know how to find him in this city. I went to the bar again next day and afterward, but he did not come."

"What was your husband wearing the last time you saw him? When he walked out of the Lucky Tiger Bar?"

"Just his everyday clothes. Harry is not a fancy dresser, but neat."

"Did he have a green suede jacket?"

"He wore that, yes. It was new this fall." Her eyes were unwaveringly fixed on his. "You have found Harry, Mr. Shayne?"

"I'm afraid I have, Hilda. I think he's . . . dead."

She didn't cry out. She didn't blink her eyes, and tears began silently rolling down her cheeks. She said, "I think I knew it would be. Inside me, I knew. Tell me, Mr. Shayne."

Shayne told her as gently as he could. "Im not positive, of course. You'll have to make the identification."

"But why, Mr. Shayne? At Mr. Henderson's house with a pistol in the night?"

Shayne said, "First, he must be identified." He stood up. "You'd better get dressed." He looked about the room and saw there was no telephone. "Is there a pay phone?"

"In the hallway outside." Still outwardly composed, Hilda threw the covers off her legs and stood up.

Shayne said, "I'll use it while you dress. Open the door when you're ready."

He went out into the dimly lit hall and found a wall telephone. He dialed Miami Beach Police Headquarters, and after a little difficulty got Painter himself on the wire.

"Mike Shayne calling. I think I can identify that corpse for you."

He heard a swift intake of breath over the telephone. "So you did know something, Shayne. By God, I . . ."

"I followed up a hunch and I think it's going to pay off for you," Shayne told him smoothly. "Mrs. Harry Gleason is coming over in a taxicab to the morgue to look at him. I think he's her husband."

"Gleason? What's the full story, Shayne?"

"Mrs. Gleason will give it to you . . . if it is her Harry. Better meet her at the morgue in twenty minutes."

Shayne hung up before Painter could say anything more. The door of Hilda's room opened as he turned away from the phone, and she stood in the doorway wearing a dark two-piece suit with a white silk blouse, and she was settling her Harlequin glasses over her eyes.

She stepped aside as Shayne

reentered the room, and he told her. "We'll go down and I'll put you in a cab to go across to the morgue on the Beach. Chief Peter Painter will meet you there, and if you identify your husband he'll want a statement from you. I don't want to be there while you make it."

He took both her hands in his and looked down at the blue-tinted glasses. "Do you trust me, Hilda? Will you do exactly as I say?"

"I trust you."

"Then tell Painter the truth as you told it to me just now. But leave out the girl, Hilda. Just don't mention her being in Algonquin, or seeing her here!"

She said, "I will do what you ask. I will not say a word about the girl."

Shayne went out and she followed him, turning off the light and locking the door. Downstairs, they got in Shayne's car and he drove to Flagler where he found an empty cab and put her in it. He pressed her hand tightly and said, "I'll see you later, Hilda. Right now I've got a lot of things to do."

He stood and watched the cab pull away, and felt sorry as hell for the self-contained woman whose ten years of married happiness had ended so tragically. Then he drove to his hotel where he had promised to meet Timothy Rourke.

X

THE GANGLING REPORTER had had a key to Shayne's second-floor suite for many years, and Shayne found him there when he arrived, comfortably ensconced in a deep chair with the dregs of a highball in his right hand.

Shayne went to his own chair and sank into it with a sigh.

"All right, Tim. You're going to get the whole story now. Maybe talking out loud will clarify things in my own mind. Your Jane Smith of the newspaper ad was Muriel Graham, of course. She told me so that night when she explained why she was offering fifty grand to get him bumped off."

"And why was she?" Rourke's deep-set eyes were bright with eager curiosity.

Shayne told him. Starting from the beginning, he repeated the girl's hysterical story in her own words as well as he could remember them.

He was striding up and down the room, running knobby fingers through his coarse red hair when he finished. "That's why I refused to tell you the full truth that night, Tim. Damn it, I was sorry as hell for the kid, but I couldn't even pretend to fall in with her crazy plan."

"That brings us to when you shoved me down the stairs. Was your late visitor just as I was

leaving Jane Smith as you hoped?"

"No. She was another woman entirely. She was wearing Harlequin glasses. Remember?"

"Harlequin glasses?" Rourke did a fast double-take. "Tinted blue?"

Shayne dropped back into his chair and nodded. "The woman who arrived late at Henderson's party yesterday afternoon, and whom I cornered briefly. Hilda Gleason is her name. She had a story of her own to tell."

He briefly repeated the story Hilda had told him that first evening. "So you can see why I wasn't too surprised to see her pop up at Henderson's, but didn't understand how she had got there. There was that past connection between the man's stepdaughter and her husband."

"What past connection?" asked Rourke, puzzled.

"I just told you. About the phone call from Denton, Illinois. And Hilda going down to the saloon to watch her husband meet the girl and go off for a conference with her. That girl who met Gleason in Illinois was Muriel Graham . . . who called herself Jane Smith in the advertisement."

"Yeh. I got that angle straight now. So, how did this Hilda Gleason manage to pop up at Henderson's cocktail party?"

"By going to Henderson's office the preceding day under an assumed name, and representing herself to be a lone widow who needed advice on her investments. She's attractive enough so it wasn't difficult for her to wangle an invitation from him. I just left her a few minutes ago," he went on wearily.

"And this time she told me the truth." He filled the reporter in briefly on Hilda's amended story. "So I just put her in a cab headed for the Beach morgue to see if the dead man is Harry Gleason."

Timothy Rourke was sitting upright, scribbling notes furiously, his lean features avidly intent. "Will she be there yet?"

Shayne glanced at his watch. "Better give her another ten minutes."

Rourke stopped scribbling and settled back with a frown. "This is one hell of a mixed up mess. How did Muriel Graham and Gleason manage to make contact in Illinois a month ago? Here you've got two people who evidently hate the same man for different reasons, but how did they get to know each other?"

"Muriel is the only one who can tell us that now. Do you happen to know whether Henderson succeeded in contacting her?"

"Yeh," Rourke said absently. "Our man phoned in from the Beach just before I left the office. Muriel Graham is due in on a

jet flight at seven-ten this morning."

"Good. I'll damned well be at the airport to meet her."

"Along with Painter and his boys."

Shayne said, "I'm not so sure of that. Petey is more likely to be catching up on his beauty sleep. After all, he doesn't know any of this background stuff on her."

"He will if Mrs. Gleason identifies her husband and tells her story."

"She promised me she'd keep Muriel out of it until I had a chance to check further."

"What bothers hell out of me," muttered Rourke, "is why Muriel was still trying to hire somebody to do the job on Henderson just a few days ago, if she had already hired Gleason a month ago."

"I know. But we don't know for sure that she did. Damn it, Tim! If there's any way in the world to do so I want to avoid tossing Muriel to Painter and you boys. A story like that will hang over her head the rest of her life. Even her fiancé, who seems a nice enough kid, probably won't be able to stomach the whole truth. There are so many obstacles to clearing her," he added bitterly.

"Such as?"

"Such as: Who *is* Saul Henderson? According to Mrs. Gleason, that isn't his name. What's the connection between Gleason and him, going back to the period before she and Gleason were married. Get your paper to work on Henderson's background, Tim. Contact the News Services in New York and have them start some discreet digging. Get us some ammunition before seven o'clock."

"I'll try," Rourke said doubtfully. "It's pretty early in the morning to get any real action out of New York." He yawned and got up. "What will you be doing?"

Shayne said, "I don't know."

"Sitting on your dead butt while I dig up information for you?" suggested Rourke good-humoredly.

Shayne said, "It's your story you're going after. Hell, I don't even have a client or a retainer."

"You meeting the seven-ten plane?" asked Rourke as he strolled toward the door.

"Let's meet at the airport about six-forty-five to see if you've got anything. The coffee shop."

Rourke said, "Fine," and went out with a farewell wave of his hand.

Shayne relaxed for five minutes, then consulted his old address book from the center drawer of the sitting room table, and found a Chicago number which he called.

He sat and listened while the phone rang at least a dozen times in the Midwestern city, and he grinned happily when a surly and sleepy voice finally replied.

"That you, Bitsy?" he asked.

"Yeah. Who's that sounding so happy to wake a guy up?"

"Mike Shayne."

"Mike . . . *Shayne?* I'll be damned. You in town, Mike?"

"Nope. Miami."

"What's up?" Bitsy Baker's voice was suddenly wideawake and businesslike.

"You free to take on a little job?"

"Soon as it gets daylight out here."

"Write this down, Bitsy. Algonquin, Illinois. Know where it is?"

"Sure. Out in the country a little way. Forty minutes to get there, if you drive fast."

"Get out there by the time the farmers start waking up. There's a Harry Gleason just been killed here tonight. Lived in Algonquin ten years. Bartender in some bar. Get every damned thing you can on Harry Gleason and his wife Hilda, a native of the town. What I want mostly is background on Gleason. As far back as you can get. He may have had a different name in the past. Check the cops, newspapers and friends . . . you know. Get whatever you can and call my office collect before ten o'clock. I'll know by then whether I want you to do any more."

"Sure, Mike. How're things otherwise?"

Shayne said, "Dull."

"Same here. Ten o'clock. Bye."

Shayne said, "Goodbye, Bitsy," and hung up. He paced the floor a short time longer, and then called the Henderson number on Miami Beach.

Mr. Henderson's voice answered promptly, indicating that the financier hadn't been any more able to sleep than Shayne had.

The detective slurred his voice into a slangy southern drawl, "That there Mister Henderson?"

"This is Henderson, yes. Who's calling?"

"This here's a frien' uh Harry's, pal."

There was a long pause and Shayne wondered if the man would hang up. He didn't. He asked uncertainly, "Harry who?"

"Harry Gleason, thass who." Shayne chuckled evilly. "You didn' reckon it was all ended nice an' clean an' sweet just from you knockin' Harry off, did yuh?"

"I haven't the faintest idea what you are talking about." Henderson was breathing hard and the words sounded as though he almost strangled over them.

"I reckon you kin guess. I'll be be seein' yuh." Shayne hung up and wiped beads of sweat from his forehead. He fervently hoped

that Henderson was sweating too.

He looked at his watch and went into the kitchenette to put water on to boil, and measured coffee into a dripolator.

He was pouring in the water when the phone rang. He went back into the living room and picked up the receiver. "Shayne?" a shaken voice asked. "Henderson. Could you come over?" He sounded pathetically eager. "Right away, if you can. I've got to have a talk with you."

Shayne said, "I can be there in half an hour," and hung up. He finished his coffee with satisfaction, and went out to drive over to the Beach. There were no cars in the Henderson driveway, when he got there. He turned in the drive to park in front of the door.

Henderson opened it for him as soon as he pressed the buzzer. He was fully dressed and clean-shaven, but his thin features were strained and his eyes were bloodshot. He led the way through the archway and dropped disconsolately into a deep chair beside an ashtray piled high with half-smoked cigarette butts.

"This has been a most harrowing experience." He rubbed the back of his right hand wearily across his eyes. "Worse than what I went through with the police."

"Tell me about it." Shayne sprawled his rangy body into a chair near him.

"There was an anonymous telephone call. Mysterious and definitely threatening." He settled back and half closed his eyes and repeated what Shayne had said to him over the telephone almost word for word.

"I swear I don't know anyone named Harry Gleason," he protested as he finished. "I can't make head nor tail of it. But it does indicate that . . . that my life is still in danger. I beg you to take the case, Mr. Shayne. Find out who is threatening me, and why."

"I'll consider it if you'll come clean with me."

"But I've told you everything."

Shayne said, "Not quite, I'm afraid. You can make a start by telling me what name you used before you started calling yourself Saul Henderson."

All the color drained from Henderson's face. He wilted in his chair, white-faced and panicky. Then he called on some inner reserves and swung angrily to his feet.

"I don't know what your game is, Shayne, but whatever it is, I don't like it. You've been throwing out veiled hints and implications ever since yesterday afternoon, and I've had enough of it. I'll see you to the door."

He swung on his heel and walked stiffly toward the archway and Shayne came quickly to his feet to follow him, pausing

by his host's chair to pick up the empty liqueur glass carefully by the fragile stem, and drop it into the side pocket of his jacket.

Henderson was standing holding the front door wide open when Shayne ambled out. He drove swiftly back to Miami and stopped at police headquarters where he found Sergeant Calhoun on duty in the Identification Department. He took the liqueur glass carefully from his pocket, handling it by the flared bottom, and told the sergeant:

"This should have some pretty good prints that might have a bearing on that Beach killing. Get an authorization from Chief Gentry if you need it, but I wish you'd rush them to Washington fast."

Sergeant Calhoun said cheerfully, "I'll get them off first, and ask for the authorization later, Mike."

Shayne hurried out of the building to his car and drove directly to the airport. It was two minutes after seven o'clock when he got his car parked and reached the coffee shop. Timothy Rourke occupied a stool near the door, nursing a cup of black coffee.

Shayne sat beside him and said, "The same" to a white-jacketed waiter. "Any luck, Tim?"

"About what you'd expect. A few unimportant items going back past his marriage to Mrs. Graham. Reading between the lines, there's nothing to indicate he was very much of anybody or had too much dough until he latched onto the rich widow. As soon as offices open in New York, there'll be a squad of legmen going around interviewing everyone who had contact with him before his marriage." He looked at his watch as the waiter put a cup of coffee in front of Shayne. "Plane's due in about three minutes. On time, they say."

Shayne nodded absently taking a sip of hot coffee and wishing he were home drinking his own brew. "Watch out for Henderson to blow a gasket when I try to grab hold of the girl for a quiet talk. Shove him around a little if you have to in order to give me a crack at her."

Rourke nodded as the loudspeaker announced the arrival of Muriel Graham's flight from New York. They got up and joined a small group of waiting people moving toward the gate through which incoming passengers would come. As they worked their way toward the gate, Shayne nudged Rourke and pointed toward Peter Painter flanked by two Miami cops standing squarely in front of the barrier. "Petey isn't missing a bet."

"And there's Henderson who doesn't look to happy to see him,"

Rourke rejoined, jerking his head toward the harried-looking Henderson pushing his way through to come up immediately behind the chief of detectives.

The readhead and the reporter watched with interest as deplaning passengers streamed toward the gate. There weren't too many arrivals on this early flight, and Shayne didn't see Jane Smith among them. He was beginning to wonder if she had missed the plane or had intentionally stayed away when he saw a very tall and slender, dark-haired girl at the end of the line stop in front of Henderson and say something to him, and then languidly accept his outstretched hand.

With a bleak look of questioning on his face, Shayne shoved forward just as Painter moved in officiously and took the tall girl's arm.

"Miss Muriel Graham?" he demanded, with a glint of near-certainty in his eyes.

She looked sideways and down at his hand on her arm while Saul Henderson thrust his face close to Painter's and grated, "This is my stepdaughter, yes. But she's very tired from her trip and I'll have to ask you to excuse me now. Later . . . after she's rested."

"I want to talk to her now, Henderson." Painter kept his hand firmly on her arm and drew her away, nodding curtly to one of the uniformed policemen who interposed his bulk between the girl and Henderson.

Shayne tapped Painter on the shoulder as the little man turned away with the girl, paying no need to Henderson's loudly voiced objections.

"You're making a mistake, Petey. This girl is . . ."

"An important witness whom I'm taking into custody for questioning," Painter told him officiously. "I don't need any advice or interference from you, Shayne."

The redhead shrugged and stepped back with a quizzical grin on his face while Painter triumphantly led the girl inside the terminal building with Henderson still being forcibly detained from following them by the policeman.

"That girl isn't Muriel Graham, Tim," Shayne said quietly.

"She isn't? Didn't you hear Henderson introduce her as his stepdaughter?"

"I heard him," Shayne agreed grimly. "But she's a ringer, Tim. That's not my Jane Smith. Remember that Henderson made the contact in New York personally and arranged to have her fly down. God knows what sort of story this one will tell Painter."

"Well, you hoped to keep Muriel out of it," chuckled Rourke. "It's not your fault that Painter wouldn't listen when you tried to tell him the truth."

Shayne muttered. "You can be

a witness that I tried to warn him, Tim. But he was so damned afraid that I would horn in."

He grinned suddenly and delightedly, and moved toward the building entrance with long strides. "Maybe I've still got time to wrap this up while Painter is listening to whatever story Henderson wants him to hear."

XI

IN THE AIRPORT parking lot, Shayne paused beside the reporter's car while Rourke got in. He said, "I'm headed for a cup of decent coffee and some heavy thinking. Keep in touch with Painter on the Beach for anything they turn up on Gleason . . . and push those New York enquiries on Henderson, Tim. I'm getting a stronger hunch all the time that this whole case had its beginnings 'way back in his past."

"Who do you suppose the girl is that Henderson has brought in to impersonate his stepdaughter?"

The redhead shrugged. "He was really on the spot there. He must have sweated blood early this morning knowing Muriel would almost certainly break down and spill her guts if she were hauled back here to testify. Give the guy credit for thinking fast," he went on angrily, "and arranging things neatly. She'll load Painter with a story about what a wonderful father Henderson has been to her, and he'll swallow it hook, line and sinker."

He turned and strode off to his own car while Rourke lifted a hand in farewell and drove away.

Two hours and four mugs of coffee later, shaved and freshly dressed, Michael Shayne entered his office on Flagler Street and found Lucy already at her desk in the anteroom. She glanced at her watch meaningfully and said, "Practically the crack of dawn, Mr. Shayne. Congratulations."

"Stay your busy self—just for today, angel," he said. *"Pleáse!"*

She shrugged and pursed her lips.

In his office he sighed heavily and sat wearily behind his bare, flat-topped desk. He slowly lit a cigarette, and dropped the match into a tray as his phone buzzer sounded. He scooped it up and said: "Hello! Who is this?" His tone was terse.

Rourke's voice said, "A couple of interesting things from Beach homicide, Mike. Item one: A fast report from Washington on Gleason's fingerprints identify him as an ex-con. He did a ten-year stretch in the Colorado pen for arson. Released twelve years ago. Item two: Ballistics says that the twenty-two pistol Gleason carried is the same gun that fired the bullet into Henderson's automobile in the first murder attempt against him a few days ago."

Shayne said, "Anything else

from your pipeline to Henderson's past?"

"Nothing yet. And that's sort of curious in itself. Right now it looks as though he appeared from nowhere a few years ago and feathered his nest with nice soft banknotes by marrying a wealthy widow."

"With a nubile stepdaughter," said Shayne grimly.

"With a nubile stepdaughter," agreed Rourke no less grimly.

Shayne said, "Keep on digging," and hung up.

He leaned back in his swivel chair and took a lazy drag on his cigarette as Lucy hurried into her office with color flaming in her cheeks.

"I heard everything Tim said, Michael."

"No reason why you shouldn't."

"You are mixed up in the Henderson case, aren't you? Why didn't you tell me? After all—"

"After all, what, angel? Can I help if it a woman's curiosity can kill seven cats?" He yawned widely. "Get Will Gentry on the phone and ask him if—"

His desk telephone interrupted him. Lucy compressed her lips firmly and reached for it. She said, "Michael Shayne's office," then nodded and said in a subdued voice, "He's right here, Chief Gentry."

Shayne took the instrument from her and said, "I was about to call you, Will."

"Sure. Any time you want a job done for free, just call on the Miami Police Department, Mike."

"That's what I always figured," said Shayne cheerfully. "Service with a smile. What you got this time, Will?"

"Some hocus-pocus about fingerprints you turned in to Sergeant Calhoun without bothering to get an authorization from me."

"And?"

"Where'd you lift those prints, Mike?"

"You know that crazy hobby I've got . . . lifting fingerprints? It's a sort of compulsion with me. Every time I see a nice set of prints . . ."

"Come off it, Mike." Gentry's voice was bluntly forceful. "Calhoun says they tie in with the Henderson kill on the Beach."

"They do."

"How?"

"That's Painter's baby, Will. You wouldn't want to horn in on his territory." Shayne made his voice mildly reproving.

"Goddammit, Mike!" Gentry paused to regain control of his temper. "The man's a fugitive, Mike. Don't cover up for him."

"I won't. What's the rap against him?"

"Arson and manslaughter. Twenty years ago in Endore, Colorado. The man's name is Ernie Combs."

Shayne frowned and tugged at his left earlobe with right thumb

and forefinger. He repeated aloud, "Endore, Colorado?" nodding at Lucy to make a note of it. "That's all you got, huh?"

"That's all Washington gave us. I'll tell you this right now, Mike, there are limits to—"

Shayne said, "Thanks a million," and hung up. He looked at his watch and told Lucy, "It's too early in Colorado to call anybody, but try it anyway. Get the police department or sheriff's office in Endore, Colorado."

She nodded efficiently and hurried out to the other office. Five minutes later Lucy said, "I have Chief of Police Dyer of Endore Colorado on the wire, Mr. Shayne."

He snatched up the phone. "Chief Dyer? I'm sorry to bother you so early in the morning, but we've got a murder case here in Miami that you may be able to help us with."

A rasping voice chuckled, "Chickens have been up out here for two hours so 'tain't so early. Say your name is Shayne?"

"Michael Shayne. How far do you go back on the force, Chief?"

"Further'n you, I reckon, son. What you wanta know?"

"Twenty years ago," Shayne told him succinctly. "An arson job. You still have a warrant outstanding for Ernie Combs?"

"That murderin' ugly son," grated the thin voice over more than two thousand miles of telephone wire. "You got him there?"

"Did you say murder, Chief?"

"Close enough. Wife died in the hospital two months afterward givin' birth to a boy-child, but it was the burns that killed her. I allus swore I'd get that Ernie."

"A man named Gleason implicated with him?"

"Harry Gleason. Yep. He took his rap and served his time like a man. But that goddamned slippery Ernie Combs . . ."

"We've got him on ice for you here, Chief," Shayne interrupted him. "Any reward offered?"

"There was ten thousand put up when it happened more'n twenty years ago. I reckon maybe it still stands good."

Shayne said, "I'll be in touch with you later," and hung up.

With slow deliberation, he said, "Go out and close the door, Lucy. Don't put any calls through. Nothing." He got up slowly, his gaze bleak and abstracted, while Lucy withdrew quietly and drew the door shut behind her.

Michael Shayne stood at the window for a long time, looking down at the slow-moving traffic going eastward on Flagler Street while a frown of fierce concentration creased his brow and his mind played with the broken and jagged pieces of the puzzle that had been put into his hands.

When the telephone finally recalled him to his desk, he saw with

a start of real surprise that it was almost eleven o'clock.

Lucy Hamilton said apologetically, "I know you told me not to bother you, Michael, but there's a long distance call from some man named Bitsy Baker, and he insists that you—"

Shayne said, "Put him on, angel."

Bitsy's voice came over the line a moment later, "Mike. I'm in Algonquin, but I haven't got much."

"Give it to me."

"Harry Gleason is a quiet sort of Joe. Well-liked here, with a nice wife. No one knows much about him or where he came from. Close-mouthed cuss, I guess. He sort of turned up here ten years ago . . ."

"How about the last couple of months?" Shayne put in sharply.

"Yeh. Well, he has been sort of changed and surly. No one seems to know why he took off suddenly or where he went. Then his wife disappeared too. They all figure he took a runout powder on her and she followed him. If you want me to keep on digging, Mike . . ." Bitsy Baker's tone was questioning and apologetic.

"You can drop that angle," Shayne said decisively. He hesitated, rubbing his angular jaw thoughtfully. "You know a town in Illinois named Denton?"

"Yeh. Little place south of here. Close in to Chi. You got something there?"

Shayne said, "I . . ." Then after a thoughtful pause he said decisively, "I think it's something I'd better handle myself. Bill me for your time, Bitsy, and thanks."

He depressed the cradle and released it, told Lucy in the outer office, "Check with information to see if a telephone is listed under the name of Combs in Denton, Illinois. I don't have any address." He hung up and sat back and relaxed broodingly until Lucy reported: "There is a Denton number for a Roy Combs, Michael. The only one in Denton."

"Can you dial it direct?"

"I think so. I'll check."

Shayne got up and picked the open cognac bottle from the top of the filing cabinet and strode into the other room. His secretary was looking in the front pages of the telephone book and she looked up and nodded as he lowered one hip onto the low railing beside her desk with the bottle dangling from his big hand. She said, "I can dial it."

"Go ahead. And give me the phone."

He drank deeply from the neck of the bottle while she dialed the long distance circuit and the Denton number she had written down. She listened a moment and gave his local number to the operator and then silently handed the instrument to him.

He heard it ringing far away in Denton, Illinois, and then it stopped and a woman's voice said, "Hello?"

"Is Roy at home?" asked Shayne gruffly.

"No. He won't be back until a little after lunch. Is that Pete?"

Shayne said, "No," and hung up. He told Lucy, "Get me a seat on the first jet flight to Chicago. Round trip. With a return reservation this afternoon if you can."

XII

IT WAS LESS THAN a half-hour drive by taxi from the O'Hara Airport to the small town of Denton. Shayne had the driver stop at a filling station on the outskirts of the village where he consulted a telephone book and got the street address of Roy Combs. The station attendent told him to continue as they were to the first traffic light, then turn left for a block and a half.

They did so, and drew up in front of a small sun-bathed house in a row of similar small, frame houses, each with its neat rectangle of front yard and attached one-car garage.

Shayne got out and told the driver to wait with his flag down, and strode up the cinder walk to the front door framed by trellised roses. There was no electric button, so he knocked and waited.

The door opened and a young girl stood in the dimly cool interior looking out at him questioningly. She wore tight, black Toreador pants and a fresh white cotton blouse, and was barefooted. Smooth black hair with curling tips hung down on each side of her face to frame the piquant features.

Shayne took off his hat and said gravely, "Hello, Jane Smith."

A little cry of terror and of recognition escaped her lips. Her black eyes widened and she put her right hand impulsively up to her mouth, gnawing at the knuckles with sharp white teeth like a small child in the face of catastrophe.

Shayne stepped inside the square living room and closed the front door behind him. As his eyes adjusted themselves from the bright sunlight, he gazed somberly about at the worn rug on the floor, shabby cretonne slipcovers on the furniture and two Grant Wood reproductions on the walls. The sitting room was clean and tidy, and spoke of lower, middle-class poverty.

His gaze went back to the slender figure of the girl whose head was still bowed and turned away from him, and then it lifted and went beyond her to the figure of a young man standing in the open doorway beyond her. He wore cotton slacks and a Tee-shirt, and his sandy hair was damp and freshly brushed.

Shayne said sardonically, "And Paul Winterbottom. Last time I saw you was in a Miami bar, Paul. Or do you prefer to be called Roy?'

Shayne dropped his hat on a low

table and lowered his rangy body into a deep chair near the door. He said drily, "I have a seat reserved on a four o'clock plane back to Miami. Let's get some talking done."

"All right," said the young man fiercely. "So you chased us down. So what? You can't pin anything on us. We haven't done anything wrong."

"Have you seen today's paper?"

"No."

"Your father shot and killed a man in Miami last night," Shayne informed him bleakly.

Roy Combs staggered back, releasing his wife. He stuttered, "My . . . father?"

Free of his arms, the girl straightened and tossed her head back, then whirled to face Shayne, advancing toward him soundlessly on bare feet, hands outstretched, curved and clawlike.

"Don't call him that." Her voice and face were dangerously calm. "Don't ever call him that."

"Wait, Beth." Roy stumbled forward and caught her arm, pulled her back. "Who did he kill, Mr. Wayne?"

"Harry Gleason."

They stood close together in front of him, trembling and looking at each other.

Shayne kept his voice hard and impersonal. He said, "Sit down on the sofa, you two, and answer some questions." He got out a cigarette and lit it while the frightened young couple moved back and sat down side by side on the sofa, holding hands tightly and with their eyes fixed on Shayne as though he were a bomb with a short fuse that was burning down fast.

"How much do you know about what happened in Endore, Colorado more than twenty years ago?"

"Everything," said Roy Combs bitterly. "When Harry Gleason finished his stretch in the penitentiary, he took me out of the State Home where I'd been since birth and put me with a private family where he paid my room and board until I finished high-school. Then he showed me the old clippings and told me the whole story about my father and mother. And now you say Harry's dead. Henderson killed him? Just like he killed my mother . . ." He broke off into dry sobs.

Shayne said, "I'm afraid it was self defense. Gleason came to his house with a gun at midnight, and Henderson shot first."

"I don't believe it. He just fixed it to look that way. Harry wouldn't have done that. He was hellbent on peace. He made us promise we wouldn't do anything to Henderson after he saw him on television that time and he knew he was still alive."

Shayne shook his head. "There's evidence that Gleason made one previous attempt with the same

gun he threatened Henderson with last night. And whoever you hired to plant the bomb on Henderson's boat didn't help matters either," he went on deliberately. "With two unsuccessful attempts on his life in the last few days, he had every legal right to shoot first without asking questions when Gleason turned up on his doorstep last night."

"We don't know anything about a bomb," said Roy fiercely. "We didn't hire anybody to do anything. You tell him, Beth."

"I couldn't find anybody who'd do it," she said listlessly. "Even with that wonderful story I thought up and offering them all the money in the world. They still wouldn't do it. Just like you," she ended with a faint curl of her upper lip. "All I got was good advice like you gave me. It was the last thing I wanted from you."

"It was a crazy idea from the word go," put in her husband vehemently. "My God! if I'd had the faintest idea what Beth was up to, I'd never have let her go to Miami. But she claimed she just wanted to find out what kind of man he was . . . to spy out the situation for Harry and help him put the clamps on him later."

"To blackmail him?" asked Shayne harshly.

"Call it blackmail if you want to. I don't. I didn't blame Harry one bit. God in heaven! think what he'd been through on account of him."

"What," asked Shayne, "had he been through?"

Then the whole story of perfidy almost a quarter of a century before poured out of the young man's eager lips while Shayne sat very quiet in the small living room and listened to it.

In mid-depression years, Ernest Combs and Harry Gleason were equal partners in a wholesale business in a suburban community near Denver, Colorado. With slack times and a succession of bad breaks, they faced the prospect of losing their business and everything they had invested. With a large stock of heavily-mortgaged and completely-insured goods in an isolated warehouse, the two desperate men had hit upon the expedient of selling off the stock secretly and at a high discount, and salting away the proceeds in cash —then burning the empty warehouse to the ground and collecting insurance on the non-existent contents.

The plot had been carefully planned and was put into effect one wintry evening when a heavy snowfall made it difficult for fire engines to operate.

One terrible hitch occurred at the last moment after the fire had been carefully set in several places and the two partners were escaping safely. Combs' young wife, seven months pregnant, had learned of their plan and gone to

the warehouse to stop them, unknown to either of them.

It wasn't until the incendiary flames were raging and they were both safely outside the building that they became aware that Mrs. Combs was trapped inside and would surely perish unless they took prompt action to save her.

According to young Roy Combs' bitter story, the two men reacted differently under stress. Combs cursed his wife's stupidity in putting herself in jeopardy and washed his hands of the whole affair, disappearing into the night without a trace—and taking with him the entire cache of cash the two men had secreted.

Harry Gleason, on the other hand, turned in the other direction to turn in a fire alarm and then sped back into the burning building in an effort to save his partner's wife.

Due to his prompt action, the fire apparatus arrived in time to save the building from complete destruction (thus baring the arson plot) and to rescue Gleason and Mrs. Combs alive.

The woman, however, suffered such severe burns that she was hospitalized and never recovered, dying two months later because of her weakened condition as a result of her injuries when a son, Roy, was born to her.

Gleason had been promptly sentenced to the penitentiary for his part in the crime, and a nationwide search was instituted for Ernie Combs—without avail. No trace of him had ever been discovered—until one night in Algonquin, Illinois, when his face appeared on the television screen in front of a bartender and his wife, and he was identified as Saul Henderson, wealthy widower of Miami Beach and mayoralty candidate of that city. There was no doubt in Gleason's mind at all.

"Harry telephoned me that night," Roy Combs told Shayne stonily. "He was all fired up to notify the police immediately, but I told him to wait. I drove up and talked to him one afternoon. By that time, he had quieted down and was talking about threatening Henderson with exposure and making him pay all his money for our silence. We talked it all over and couldn't agree on anything. Frankly, I wanted to see him suffer for what he had done to my mother, but I couldn't help thinking about all that money he had inherited from the woman he'd married . . . and the way Beth and I live here on my salary as a garage mechanic. Much as I hate to admit it, I am his legal son, and can prove it, and I would inherit everything if he died.

"Oh, we talked it over and over and over," he went on with a bitter twist to his young mouth. "Harry and I, and Beth and I. Beth, I think, hated him worse than I did. I guess it was a female trait . . .

because of what he did to my mother."

"So you and your wife decided on this Jane Smith deal?" said Shayne as the young man paused.

"Not exactly. That was entirely her own idea, and she didn't confide a word of it to Harry or me."

Shayne turned his attention to Beth. "I'm curious about you, young lady. Where did you get the idea of masquerading as Henderson's step-daughter and telling the weird tale you unfolded to me in that hotel room?"

She sat bolt upright on the sofa with her hands clasped primly in front of her. "It seemed like a perfectly wonderful idea. I went down and read all the newspapers and talked to people and found out everything I could about him and his dead wife and Muriel Graham. And then I just made up that story. I tried to think of some good reason for wanting him dead and for offering to pay so much money to hire it done."

"I told her it was the craziest thing in the world, Mr. Wayne," Roy Combs cut in. "As soon as I found out what she had done. You see, she didn't tell me a word about it until you had answered that advertisement and she had made her plans to meet you. Then she wrote me a letter. I hopped on a plane and went right down there to stop her, and got to Miami that evening while she was meeting you.

"When she saw me afterward and told me what you said . . . about being a friend of that famous detective, Mike Shayne and all, I was scared to death you would tell him, and that's why I called you next day and pretended to be Paul Winterbottom . . . so you'd know she wasn't going to go on with it and try to get anyone else to do the job."

"But she did," Shayne said flatly. "She found someone who planted a bomb on his boat and tried to kill him that way."

"You didn't, did you, Beth? You promised me."

"I swear I didn't, Roy. I did have the name of one other man in New York that I didn't tell you about, and I tried to get him to do it when I stopped off there on my way home. B-b-but he was just like Mr. Wayne." Tears streamed down her face and she wiped them away with the back of her hand defiantly.

"It seemed like it was foolproof when I made it up," she sobbed. "Saul Henderson doesn't deserve to keep on living. And it wouldn't really have hurt the Graham girl any. She could easily deny knowing anything about it and refuse to pay the money I was promising in her name. And I bet she hates him too and would be glad to see him dead," she added viciously. "Maybe he never did do to her what I dreamed up and told you, Mr. Wayne, but I bet he did plenty of other things just as bad. I'm not

sorry I tried at all. I'm just sorry that I failed."

"Yeh," said Roy dismally. "And that Harry got impatient and went down and tried to shake him down on his own. If he'd only waited. We could have figured out something better between us. And no matter what you say," he went on forcibly, "I don't believe Harry ever went gunning for him. He hated his guts plenty, and figured he was due at least his share of the money Henderson ran off with, but ten years in prison was plenty for Harry and I swear I don't believe he'd take a chance on ever getting sent back."

Shayne looked at his watch and got up. He said, "After all this blows over, Roy, I suggest you take this wife of yours out to Hollywood. She'll make your fortune."

XIII

SHAYNE HAD TIME to make one telephone call from the Chicago airport before his jet flight took off. He made that call to Timothy Rourke in Miami, and as a result the reporter was at the airport to meet him when his plane landed at dusk. They went quickly to Shayne's car.

Shayne started the motor and threaded his way out of the parking lot and into an eastbound stream of traffic. "What did Gentry tell you about the prints?" he asked.

"Just that Washington identifies them as belonging to a wanted man. Whose prints are they, Mike?"

"Saul Henderson's, of course. I'm willing to bet none of your newspaper contacts picked up any back trail of Henderson's from New York. That should have tipped you off."

"They didn't," Rourke admitted uncomfortably. "Is that what your sudden trip to Chicago was all about?"

Shayne said, "Yeh. Henderson is a worthless bum, Tim. Harry Gleason took a rap for him twenty years ago and came to Miami to collect when he discovered Henderson was in the chips."

"Instead, he collected a forty-five slug," muttered Rourke. "With Henderson absolutely in the clear on that kill whether Gleason threatened him or not."

Shayne said, "He still has to answer to that old charge."

"No statute of limitations on it?"

"That's one question I've been afraid to ask," Shayne admitted irritably. "Arson and possible manslaughter. Are they subject to the statute?"

"Damned if I know. Some states, I guess. Hey! There's something else, Mike, that bothers hell out of me. That girl. Muriel Graham. The one you said Henderson had brought in as a ringer to fool Painter."

"What about her?"

"I'll swear she isn't, Mike. Isn't a ringer, I mean. I interviewed her today after Painter put her through his personal ringer, and her fiance was right there with her. A chap named Paul Winterbottom, rather well known locally. She's the real goods, all right. How could you have made such a mistake?"

Shayne said grimly, "It's easy for me. How does she feel about her stepfather?"

"Exactly the opposite from the way you expected. Insists he's a wonderful man, and can't understand why anyone would have it in for him. The only way I can figure that deal, Mike, is that you had the wool pulled over your eyes by an imposter . . . Jane Smith."

Shayne said, "You're improving, Tim. One of these days I'm going to turn my license over to you." They were on the Causeway now, leading to Miami Beach, and Shayne sighed deeply, glancing at his watch and then stepping harder on the gas as he realized they were due at Henderson's in a few minutes. He did not speak again during the remainder of the drive.

Chief Will Gentry's inconspicuously marked car was already parked in the circular driveway when they arrived, with Peter Painter's official car standing close behind it, uniformed chauffeur lounging at the wheel. A Miami taxi turned into the driveway behind Shayne, and stopped behind

him when he pulled up under the porte-cochere.

Lucy Hamilton got out of the taxi first, and hurried up to him with both her hands outstretched, a look of uncertainty on her face. "I've got Mrs. Gleason, Michael." She lowered her voice, glancing over her shoulder at the woman getting out of the taxi behind her. "I couldn't explain why you wanted her here, Michael . . . to confront the man who killed her husband. She's . . . pretty near the breaking point."

Shayne squeezed her hands tightly and pushed her toward Rourke. He went past her to Hilda, and linked his arm in hers while he leaned inside the cab and gave the driver two dollars.

"I'll take the ladies home, driver." He stood for a moment and looked down into Hilda's taut face and questioning eyes. He said, "I know this is going to be an ordeal,

but it will soon be over and you can go home to Algonquin."

"Accompanied by my husband in his coffin," she said in a tight voice.

Shayne continued to look down into her upturned face without speaking. Then he turned her about firmly with his arm in hers, and they followed Timothy Rourke and Lucy Hamilton onto the porch where Harry Gleason's blood-stains from the previous night had been cleanly washed away.

The same maid opened the door for them, and motioned them through the archway into the square room where the cocktail party had been held just twenty-four hours previously.

This time there were only four persons in the room; Henderson and his stepdaughter, and the two police officers from Miami and the Beach.

Muriel Graham sat at Henderson's right, and gravely acknowledged the introductions made by Will Gentry who stood in front of the fireplace with a half-smoked cigar in his hand, and as soon as the formalities were over and the others had seated themselves, Peter Painter turned toward Shayne aggressively.

"Suppose you come to the point, Shayne," he said. "I understand it was your suggestion that we all come here."

Shayne nodded and ruffled his red hair. He moved over to a position at the other end of the mantel from Gentry where he could look down at all the others. "I made a flying trip to Chicago today. To a little town called Denton, where I talked to a young couple named Mr. and Mrs. Roy Combs."

Gentry and Henderson were the only two who reacted to the name. The police chief paused with his cigar halfway to his mouth, and turned to look at Shayne quizzically. Henderson sat bolt upright and opened his mouth twice as though to speak, but closed it both times.

"Your son, Henderson," Shayne told him harshly. "Born twenty-two years ago when your wife died in a hospital as the result of burns she received when you and Harry Gleason burned down an empty warehouse to collect insurance on its non-existent contents."

"No!" The exclamation was torn from Hilda Gleason's lips. She wrung her hands together and her face twisted tragically. "Not Harry. There was something, but—"

"Not Harry," said Shayne, and his voice softened. "In fact, you can go right on being proud of Harry Gleason, Hilda. He was a hero twenty-two years ago even though he did serve a ten-year prison sentence for arson. It was he who went into the burning building and saved his partner's wife from certain death while her own husband left her there to die with their unborn child still in her womb."

Henderson dropped his face into his hands and did not speak. Painter jumped to his feet and thumbed his mustache. "I knew there was something like that about you all the time, Henderson. I sensed it from the beginning. That's why your life was threatened . . . why Gleason was after you. Why you had to kill him on your own doorstep."

Henderson lifted his face from his hands, looking old and broken. "I had to fire in self-defense. As soon as I saw him standing outside the door last night with a gun in his hand I knew it was he who had made the two previous attempts and that it was his life or mine. The law can't touch me for that," he ended fiercely. "And God knows I've paid through all these years for the terrible mistake I made that night so long ago. Don't you think I've paid ten times over in sleepless nights and agony of spirit?"

He got to his feet slowly and faced seven stony faces with his arms outstretched and tears streaming down his cheeks.

"I didn't know what I was doing that night. I thought they had both died in the fire. Do you understand. I thought I could do nothing to help them. Harry and I had a chartered plane waiting nearby, and I was in New Orleans before morning and aboard a ship bound for South America. It wasn't until months later that I learned

the full truth. By then, my wife was dead and Harry was serving his time. There was nothing I could do to help them by giving myself up. Don't you see? Don't you understand?"

No one answered him. Slowly, one by one, their eyes dropped from looking at him. Will Gentry chewed on his cigar for a moment and then said conversationally to Painter:

"He's your pigeon, Pete. I'm glad I don't have to dirty my hands by taking him into custody."

Henderson looked around at the ring of impassive faces slowly. He sat down jerkily and regained control of himself. "I don't know

what this fuss is all about," he told them coldly and with an evil ring of triumph in his voice. "There is a statute of limitations that applies to a case like this. In the state of Colorado, it went into effect some years ago . . . . as I was very careful to ascertain on the best legal advice. So now, I will have to ask you all to leave my house, reminding you that you are uninvited. Except you, Muriel," he went on hastily and pleadingly, "I do hope and pray that you will listen to my side of it."

She stood up and said coldly, "I have heard quite enough already. I'll be happy to go with the others."

Shayne said, "Wait a minute," and the tone of his voice made them all stand very still. "The statute of limitations doesn't apply to murder, Henderson."

"It wasn't murder," he cried out fiercely. "The charge was suspicion of manslaughter . . . and to that charge, my friend, the statute of limitations does apply."

"I'm talking about last night, not twenty-two years ago," growled Shayne.

"But you know now *why* Gleason came here. That was the only thing that bothered Chief Painter before. All right. Now he knows. I hoped I could hide the truth, but . . . since I cannot, at least it will serve to clear me."

Painter turned to Shayne angrily, and said, "The fact is, Shayne, I wasn't—"

"The fact is," Shayne interrupted him blithely, "that Painter has been ahead of you all the time, Henderson. He put his finger on it from the first moment last night when he suspected that those first two attempts on your life had been planned by you as a build-up to last night so that you *could* shoot an unarmed man down in cold blood and claim self-defense. Remember, Petey, how you pointed that out yourself in this room last night?"

"I did, didn't I?" Painter agreed in a pleased tone.

"But Harry Gleason wasn't unarmed," interjected Henderson. "He was carrying that twenty-two pistol you found on the porch beside him. The same one he'd tried to shoot me with in my car on Monday evening. Chief Painter's own ballistic tests proved that, didn't they, Chief?"

"Of course they did," agreed Shayne. "And that's exactly how Petey tied a noose around your neck."

"It it?" asked Painter with intense interest.

"Because Harry Gleason has an alibi for Monday evening when that twenty-two bullet was fired into your car cushion. He was drinking beer steadily in a bar in Miami from four o'clock in the afternoon until ten o'clock that evening. He never had that twenty-two in his possession, Henderson. You fired that decoy shot yourself

just as you exploded the gas tank on your boat when you were at a carefully calculated distance from a rescue craft so you knew you'd be picked up before you drowned. You had it in your pocket last night when you went to the front door after inviting Gleason to come here and discuss payment of blackmail, and all you had to do was press his fingerprints on it after you killed him with a slug from your forty-five.

"For God's sake, Henderson," Shayne went on in a tone of deep disgust, "Painter has had you figured for this all the time and he already has a salvage crew bringing up the remains of your boat to get proof that there wasn't any bomb at all, but just a gas tank that you blew up yourself."

"Shayne is right, Henderson." Peter Painter strutted forward officiously. "We've got you dead to rights for premeditated murder. I'm inviting you to be my guest for a few months until they hang you."

"Why," demanded Lucy Hamilton indignantly a little later while they were driving back to Miami with Rourke and Mrs. Gleason in the rear seat, "did you kow-tow so to Chief Painter and practically force him to take the credit for solving the case when you did everything yourself?"

Shayne grinned and reminded her, "We're going to be in business here for a long time, angel. Cheapest way in the world to keep Petey in a good humor . . . and this time there wasn't any money involved."

"What'll become of Jane Smith?" demanded Rourke from the rear.

Shayne chuckled and said, "Legally, I suppose Roy Combs will inherit his father's money when Henderson hangs. So Jane will come out with just what she started out to get . . . and without murder on her mind."

Next Month

TROUBLE FOR THE REDHEAD — A *MIKE SHAYNE* THRILLER

By BRETT HALLIDAY

All Quinn really wanted was to become a widower . . . by the arsenic route.

A Professional Job

by R. M. EGGLESTON

JOHN QUINN's profession was unusual. It would not have been wide of the mark to call him a dealer in arsenic and for such a relatively inexpensive substance, the rewards were astonishingly high. They usually came from insurance companies.

It was, in fact, almost an ideal occupation. It required little work beyond the exercise of patience and charm, and it had only one drawback. After each triumph Quinn had to change his name and address. And even that wasn't too bad if you liked travel.

Fortunately, Quinn liked travel and under six different and respectable names he had buried six eminently respectable and incredibly dull wives.

His latest was Angela. And she might have been made just for him. She was dull, stupid, had a large and tempting bank balance and no relatives or close friends to prove troublesome or ask disturbing questions. She was physically robust, too—remarkably so for a woman in her middle-forties.

The insurance company doctor had been most cooperative, even though unsuspecting, in confirming that she was in the best of health.

It was amusing to reflect how greatly his report had pleased and flattered her. Flattery! That was Angela's chief fault, in Quinn's eyes. She thrived on flattery. And without it she sulked.

He sighed. It must be lunch-time. Time for another of those monotonously unappetizing meals, with Angela's brainless conversation, and damnably uninspiring face. He went inside. Lunch was ready. It was boring from beginning to end.

"Angela, darling! There's nothing I like better than beef stew. It's wonderful of you to make it so often."

She simpered: "I know it's your favorite dish, dear. Besides," she giggled girlishly, "the way to a man's heart is through his stomach."

Also the way to a woman's bank balance, thought Quinn with infinite covetousness.

"Everybody says you're looking so much better now than when we arrived," she chattered on squirrel-fashion as they ate. "Marriage agrees with you. There's no doubt of it."

Quinn's fork stopped in mid-air. "Everybody says—Just who is everybody?"

Surprised at his tone, she faltered: "Why the neighbors, of course. The butcher, the grocer, well . . . just everybody."

"I don't think I care for this discussion of my health among strangers," said Quinn icily. "We've only been here three months. You can't be on first-name terms with most of these people yet. But you seem to feel you can discuss my stomach as if it was community property."

The one thing he couldn't afford was a gossiping wife. Angela had nobody elsewhere who remembered her. Why did she have to start putting down roots here.

"Well," she said, wtih a look of reproach, "the best way to get on first-name terms with anybody is to make friends. And everyone likes to talk about illnesses."

Right at that moment Quinn decided to advance the date of Angela's first dose of arsenic.

"Oh, well." He smiled, and patted her hand. "I suppose it doesn't matter. But it gives a man a queer feeling to know his stomach is well-known where he isn't. You're such a good conversationalist when you try. Can't you make friends some other way? Pass me the horseradish, will you?"

"Why?" she asked, hurt. "Didn't I season the stew enough, darling?"

"Yes, dear," he replied wearily, "I just like horseradish, that's all. The stew is wonderful, as I just told you. One of your best."

A week later, Quinn was a mildly puzzled man. Angela had taken the first quarter-grain of arsenic astonishingly well. In fact, there had been no symptoms at all.

He had followed his usual routine and given it to her in a cup of coffee—her customary nightcap. The arsenic had come from the same container that had done for Janice, Margaret and Lucy, his three most recent wives.

I wonder if arsenic sometimes fails to act as a poison, mused Quinn to himself. But the medical directory he'd consulted in the Public Library didn't seem to think so.

Angela had the disgusting habit of eating lettuce sprinkled with a mixture of sugar and milky-looking anti-nausea mixtures.

So Quinn's next step was to take her picnicking and feed her several of these, one with a generous addition of arsenic. She ate every bit of it; every crumb. But beyond saying that the lettuce seemed a bit off, it didn't affect her in the slightest.

Quinn scarcely slept that night. For the first time since his apprenticeship to the widower-creating profession, panic was entering his mind. What if she was *immune* to arsenic? He'd have to spend the rest of his life with her unless he could think of something else. And in his panic, Quinn couldn't think of anything else that was safe.

He listened to Angela snoring beside him. For one wild second, he thought of pushing her with violence from the roof of a building. But then better, less dangerous, thoughts prevailed.

"You didn't sleep too well last night, dear," said Angela solicitously next morning. "I hope you didn't catch a chill on that picnic."

"Oh no," he laughed. "I probably over-ate, that's all."

But when he didn't sleep well the next night either, Angela insisted on calling Dr. Barnett.

Quinn was furious. "That quack wouldn't know pneumonia from measles," he fumed. "He should have been disbarred from the medical profession. He's a menace to the community. At least he should retire before he becomes a wholesale murderer!"

"But dear," said Angela in surprise. "You chose him yourself. You went to him when you had that touch of rheumatism."

Quinn knew. He had gone to Dr. Barnett with the cleverly feigned touch of rheumatism simply because he was the biggest medical blunderer for miles about. That made Barnett *his* doctor—the one to be called when Angela became violently ill. But it didn't mean he wanted the fool to treat a case of over-worry over a wife who refused to be murdered.

But Angela insisted. And Dr. Barnett, round, chubby, smiling and utterly useless, came.

"You do look a bit under the weather," he admitted when he saw Quinn. "But it's nothing much. Just a run-down state of health. Nerves—overstrain. Take it easy, don't worry, and get plenty of rest.

I'll give you some pills to take three times a day after meals."

Quinn decided then that the only thing to do was to give Angela a big dose to begin with and cautiously build up on it. Not too big, of course, because even Dr. Barnett might become suspicious if she died too suddenly. But he couldn't afford to give her a lot of small doses, and wait out results. Her immunity was already astonishing, almost beyond belief. Continued small doses might very well make her impregnable!

He gave her a grain and a half . . . and confidently sat back for results.

Angela simpered, was dull, boring and made more unappetizing meals. She didn't even display a minor reaction to the arsenic.

In desperation he went to the container and poured out just over two grains of the poison, made Angela a cup of jet-black coffee and put the dose into it.

"Coffee's rather strong tonight, darling," she said. "You don't want me to stay awake, do you?

But there was no reaction.

Quinn was now a quivering nervous wreck. His eyes were red, his face flushed, his head ached and he felt like running into the street and screaming.

Angela was very worried over his health. Dr. Barnett prescribed more medicines and less worry. He took Angela aside and dwelt upon his concern at length. He informed her that unless there was an immediate improvement, he would have to send Quinn to the hospital.

Quinn, who heard the conversation, grinned mirthlessly. Don't worry! What a mockery that was —when your wife swallows arsenic with more relish than she'd eat whole-grain caviare!

For a day or two he toyed with the idea of thallium. But since the notorious cases in Sydney, Australia, chemists had become wary of anyone outside the medical profession buying thallium. And even a dumb doctor like Barnett would be curious to know why Angela's hair was falling out.

There was only one thing left to do—give her a killing dose. Three grains, enough to kill an ox.

He'd become so desperate, so frantic that he had forgotten all about Dr. Barnett's reactions if Angela died suddenly.

Lunch that day was the usual stew. Feeling as ill as he did, Quinn could barely stomach it, even though it was plastered with horseradish to give it some taste. Midway through, Angela heard the kettle boiling and ran out to make tea.

Quickly he emptied the powder over her stew and stirred it until nothing showed.

Angela came back with the tea and poured them both a cup. Then she settled down to her meal.

At the end she was still smiling happily. She pushed the plate away and sighed, comfortably. "I love good food," she murmured. "But I don't like horseradish sauce." Suddenly her voice changed, to a hard tone he had never heard before: "Not as much as you do."

He looked up in surprise. Somehow she looked like a cruel eagle instead of a boring fool.

"Didn't know you'd begun to talk in your sleep, did you?" She went on relentlessly. "Well, you have. It proves you're getting senile—*dear*. And guess what you talked about! I couldn't believe it myself at first . . . not until you got on to the business of our getting each other insured. What a lovely coincidence."

His head seemed to be spinning. It ached, his bones ached. "Coincidence," he repeated.

"That's it—dear. You were so dull and stupid when I met you and you were loaded with cash and you had no close relatives or friends who could make trouble. You seemed ideal for my purpose. And you were dead set on marrying me for my money. Just like the other three—"

Dimly, through a haze, it struck Quinn he was in some sort of a delirium. He seemed to hear Angela say she was in the same profession. "Three? You mean you murdered three husbands?"

"Funny, isn't it," she laughed. "You did it all for me. You took out the insurance policies, and you made sure we had a fool for a doctor."

Her voice changed. "I guessed you kept your stuff in that locked drawer. I borrowed your keys when you were asleep one night and changed it over to magnesia—looks just the same. Clever, don't you think?"

Once again she was laughing, but Quinn could scarcely hear her.

"Dr. Bennett won't be at all surprised to hear you've had a sudden collapse. He warned me, in fact."

Quinn tried to rise from his chair. But he couldn't.

And, as he died, Quinn was aware that Dr. Bennett would sign the death certificate without any feeling other than sympathy.

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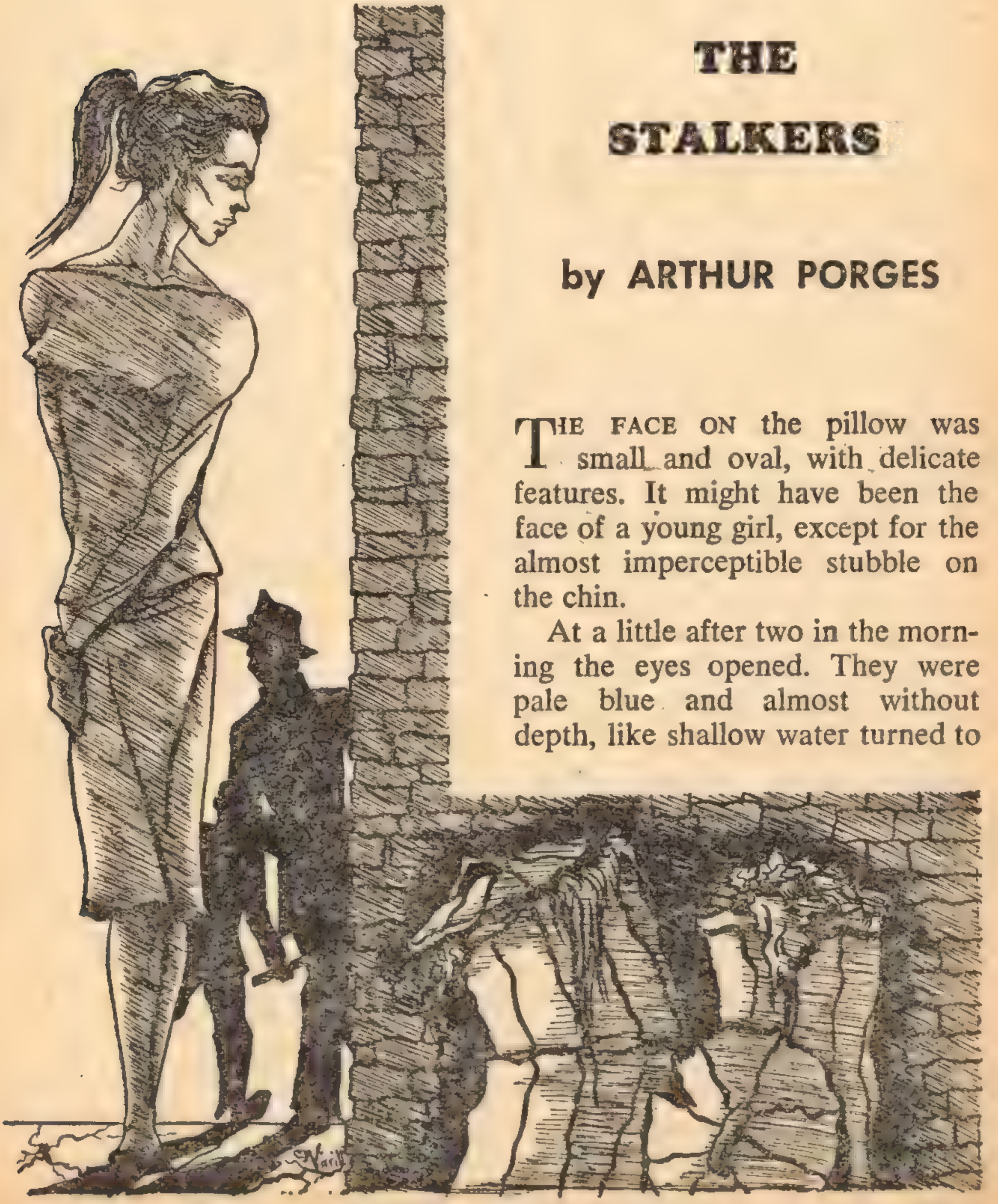
The killer was a warped psychopath. But his victims had equally dangerous quirks.



THE STALKERS

by ARTHUR PORGES

THE FACE ON the pillow was small and oval, with delicate features. It might have been the face of a young girl, except for the almost imperceptible stubble on the chin.

At a little after two in the morning the eyes opened. They were pale blue and almost without depth, like shallow water turned to

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ice. Without moving his body, Rudi glanced at the luminous dial of the clock on the night table. The time had come again.

Snapping on the bedlamp, the man slid from under the covers, which lay flat and unwrinkled, giving silent testimony to three hours of motionless sleep. Bare to the waist, his torso showed layers of rippling muscles—long, elastic bands that were powerful without bulging. He moved with a lithe grace, almost feminine, that came from knowing precisely how each part of his body was oriented at any moment.

As a pot of strong coffee perked cheerfully in the tiny bachelor's kitchen, Rudi shaved with meticulous care. Fifteen minutes later, his face baby-smooth, he sat down just long enough to drink three cups of fragrant brew, black but heavily sugared.

At two-thirty he removed the pyjama tops and began to dress. His underclothes were shorts and a thin, white tee shirt, but at that point the normal male routine took a new and remarkable course.

Over his hairless legs Rudi drew heavy-gauge, gun-metal nylons, pinning their tops to his shorts in lieu of a garter belt or its equivalent. Across his chest went the padded brassiere, giving him, despite his almost feminine features, the appearance not so much of a sexual deviate as of a masquerading, boyishly young soldier at some battle front farce, intended for the entertainment of troops long out of touch with femininity. A tight, woolly sweater, tweed skirt, ballerina slippers, and a realistic wig of top professional quality, with long, dark hair, completed his costume. On his small, narrow feet the slippers were congruous enough, without, unlike higher heels, hampering his movements.

There wasn't really any need for make-up, since the light would be poor and the contact fleeting. But just on the off chance that some officious prowl car might stop him for routine questioning, he used a lipstick and dabbed powder, very lightly, on his face. To any but the keenest gaze, a girl stood there. If the body mass was more shoulder-centered than was normal for a woman, and the hips a bit narrow, the deviations were slight because of Rudi's slender build.

At two forty-five he opened a drawer to tuck something into a pocket of the skirt. A last look in the mirror, a final tug at the pony-tail, and Rudi was ready to go. But before leaving he raised his right hand to study the cameo ring, obviously too small for him, on his little finger. As if carrying out a solemn ritual, he touched it to his lips. *Hers*. Then the door closed silently on well-oiled hinges as he left the room.

Outside it was quiet and dark. Wrapped in a humid summer

night, the city slept. Not all of it, however. Those he sought would be awake; that he could always count on.

His car was parked almost two blocks away, near a large apartment building. Anybody who saw him pulling out would naturally assume he lived there. A needless precaution, in all probability, but easy to take, and so worthwhile.

Rudi walked to his car, made a brief but careful survey of the area, and got in. The well-tuned motor started up almost noiselessly; there was no roar to awaken the curious as he glided away from the curb.

Rudi drove down several miles of side streets, found a parking place adjacent to an empty lot, and headed on foot for a badly-lighted road that ran parallel with the river. Here was a neighborhood where crime flourished almost unchecked. The police took little interest in the inhabitants, who were either petty criminals themselves, or derelicts unworthy of official concern.

When he reached a gloomy intersection which both his instinct and his experience told him might well denote an invisible boundary, he withdrew a small, gleaming object from the skirt pocket, holding it in his right hand. Sometimes they came at him from the front, but more often from behind, or out of an alley to one side. He didn't care particularly, being quite ready for any approach.

They took him for a girl—what kind, or how foolish to come here at night alone they wouldn't bother to worry about. A co-ed, slightly drunk and lost, perhaps, whose car had conked out in this hell's kitchen. Amnesia, or blind despair over some personal sorrow—what did it matter to them? She was well-dressed, obviously young, and presumably helpless. The motive of the attacker might be money, lust, or simple sadism, but he always appeared.

It was amazing how in such a neighborhood, typical of the river area Rudi worked in the dead of night, a potential victim speedily called forth a predator. There were men who slept in doorways; others who prowled streets or alleys; still others who watched from the windows of squalid rooms. They all came out like beasts of prey at the scent of blood.

Pondering these things, Rudi remained thoroughly alert, moving with a kind of nervous haste that was in itself an invitation to twisted minds. A fluttering chick in a den of foxes; a kitten wandering through a kennel of terriers. The pattern was plain, and the result easily predictable.

The attack came from ahead this time, which was rather unusual. Even though the victim appeared wholly defenceless, they normally preferred an indirect as-

sault. Was it merely the fear of being recognized and perhaps picked out for punishment later at some police line-up, or a more primitive motive, as of a hungry animal wary of startling its prey too soon, and so losing it?

Rudi stopped as if demoralized. In the poor light he could see only that the man was heavily built and that he wore a flannel shirt. Rudi peered about, apparently searching for a refuge, and almost immediately the other closed in. Backing against a crazy wooden fence entirely covered with peeling posters, Rudi waited with both hands together at his throat—a naturally feminine pose that suited his plans. Standing that way, everything about him seemed so girlish and vulnerable that the attacker had no reason to hesitate.

He could see the man's face now, stubbled and moist, a raddled mask of sly degeneracy. With a little cry of triumph he seized Rudi in his arms, drawing him tight against his chest. He stank of stale beer and sweat.

For a fraction of a second, then, he may have realized the essential masculinity of the body pressed to his, but that was all the time he would ever have to wonder about it. Rudi's trained muscles knotted. His two hands jerked upwards and out to break the other's grip —and he was free. At the same moment the switch-blade knife in his right hand snapped open to reveal eight inches of bright metal, razor sharp, and slender as any stiletto.

Before the man could realize fully the enormity of his mistake, before the hoarse cry of terror could leave his lips, Rudi's hand shot forward with feline speed and precision. The glittering steel struck home just where chin joins neck, and drove up obliquely into the base of the brain.

Dead on his feet, the man strained bolt upright for a moment, and then fell. Almost before he hit the ground, Rudi was hurrying down the street, heading back to his car.

By three forty-five he was home, his tension drained away, looking forward to bed and a dreamless sleep. No more awakening in the small hours—until next time. As he began to doze, images floated through his mind, forming a sketchy panorama just as an impressionistic painter might have imagined some night-shadowed vista before transferring it to canvas.

He saw his dead sister, Melita, again, so fragile looking, and yet resilient as Damascus steel. Had her tragic death in the river been his fault, after all? He had tried so hard to be both father and mother to her after their parents had been killed in that auto crash.

He'd been only twenty-four himself at the time. Long hours of work and sacrifice to send her

through high school, only to find her, at sixteen, conniving with a boy—Jerry Darmi, wasn't that the punk's name—to victimize lecherous older men attracted by her fresh beauty.

Rudi had pleaded, reasoned, and finally beaten the slight, defiant girl. To no avail. It had simply made the gap wider. Away every night, coming home flushed and excited from new ventures in the sordid. He had been compelled to face it: she had a quirk, a fatal twist in her nature. A craving for danger and an utter contempt for the law. To her, crime was the only really big, important adventure left.

Of her morals otherwise, he knew little. Quite possibly, being so vibrant and fastidious, she had been stingy of her favors. Perhaps that stinginess had led directly to her death. The men she associated with were not easily curbed.

And still Rudi had loved her, even while hating her behavior. It had been that way at the last, when she'd stormed from the house for good—"to live my own life without any more pious preaching from you, Big Brother!" What scorn she had managed to crowd into that title."

"I hate you," she'd added. "You smug goody-goody. You're only half a man. If only I hadn't been born a girl, you'd see!"

Yes, that was probably the true quirk. She was one of those unhappy women, relatively few in numbers, who envy men and despise their own sex.

For weeks after she had left, he had tried vainly to trace her, to beg her to return. Then she had been found—by others—a horribly bloated corpse in the river, identifiable only by her cameo ring and the laundry marks on her clothes.

"Melita!" Rudi groaned, and sat up in bed, trembling. But even in that instant of unreasoning despair, he knew that calling wouldn't help. His sister was dead, and since he'd lost her nine men had paid with their lives for attempting to prey on a woman who was really a man.

He did not consider himself a murderer, however. They had deserved to die. His role had been that of an executioner, meting out justice and retribution. Maybe one of them had killed Melita. And now, as sleep finally came to him, he experienced a moment of truth, almost of revelation. He knew the urge to kill was no longer so much a desire to avenge his sister's death as the thrill of the game itself. It was the waiting as the stalker closed in, unaware that he was himself being stalked. It was the darting, infallible stroke of the blade.

Surely the degenerates he killed were unfit to live. Could as much be said of the deer or quail men slaughtered for sport?

Thirty-six hours later, Rudi awoke again. It was not quite two—a bit earlier than usual, but good enough. And the shortest period between kills. Was the tempo going to increase in the future?

He made his preparations with his customary care. He hesitated for a moment over wearing a light coat, and decided against it. All of his excursions so far had taken place in mild weather, and the thought of a clumsy outer garment, which might restrict his movements, was distasteful to him. Even though his victims were invariably taken by surprise and were unable to put up much of a fight when they found themselves grappling with a male athlete instead of a frightened girl, there was too much at stake for him to run unnecessary risks.

Besides, he could never be chilly on one of these nights. The blood raced hot through his veins the instant he began his calculated passage down some dark street.

Tonight there was more than a hint of rain in the air. Scudding clouds almost filled the sky, and the trees swayed and rustled as a brisk breeze stirred their upper branches. A storm was on the way. There could be no doubt of that. Unless he finished the job early, he might have to give it up altogether. He had never returned home unsuccessful before, and the thought was intolerable to him. Success now had become a compulsive emotional need.

For almost an hour he walked the river front without encountering anyone sinister lurking in shadows. Three times men passed him with no more than curious glances; and once an old cripple muttered an obscene invitation, only to pass on, cackling witlessly as Rudi shrank aside. And once a bedraggled woman gave him a hard stare and husked: "Get out of here, you little fool! Go on home before you end up in the river—or worse!"

Rudi had winced, wondering if his sister might have received such a warning.

Then, at three-twenty, just after he had ducked into a doorway to avoid one of the rare police patrol cars, Rudi knew that he was being stalked once more. Two shadowy figures were after him. It had never happened before, but he had long anticipated the possibility, and was prepared for it. He had several alternate plans; in fact, depending on the criminals' tactics—plans which included instant flight if the odds became too heavy.

Covertly, while increasing his pace, he studied the two shadowy figures some twenty yards behind. They had probably been waiting in an alley which, with cool prudence, he had circled in a wide arc. Now, unable to take him by surprise, they were trailing him cautiously, prepared to attack or

retreat as circumstances dictated. Perhaps if he were to scream they might lose their nerve.

It was hard to understand why so few women seemed capable of screaming loudly for help at such a time. More often than not, judging from newspaper accounts, they found themselves unable to utter a sound. Those with good lungs and no inhibitions about using them were quite likely to get away unharmed.

The two were closer now, and one of them, short and burly, appeared to be clasping some kind of a club—a section of lead pipe perhaps. If they were both armed, he might have to run for it. Even a judo expert couldn't perform miracles.

Now they were closing in, but the burly man seemed less eager than the other. That suggested a particular plan. Rudi broke into a run, and saw, as he'd expected, that the smaller man was swiftly outstripping his companion. Rudi could easily have left them both far behind. But his purpose was rather to separate them. With twenty seconds to deal with the first, he'd be ready to tackle the other immediately afterwards.

Sure enough, the burly man was slow, while his companion ran like a deer. Should he turn at the last moment—or let the first man attack from the rear? A trifle more risky this way, but exciting, and a favorite technique of his.

A final quick glance to make sure that the smaller man was still unarmed. If a knife came into play, it would be fatal to turn his back. No, the other's hands were empty. Dealing as he thought with a small, terrified girl, the attacker would have no reason to believe that a weapon would be needed.

Rudi's hand tightened on his own knife, but he didn't press the button. Instead he made a faint whimpering noise—an added incitement to spur on the assailant.

The supreme moment came quickly. A bent arm encircled his throat from behind, tightened, pulled back—and Rudi exploded into action. Leaning forward with all the whiplash power of his muscular torso, he flung the man over his head. He landed with a bone-crushing jar, face up on the walk. In an agile follow-through, Rudi's foot came down hard on his victim's chest, pinning him relentlessly in place. The knife clicked open. Bending swiftly, Rudi made the single expert thrust which was his specialty.

It was over in a matter of seconds. It took longer for Rudi to wonder at the softness under his right foot in the thin slipper.

Rudi peered down just as a brilliant flash of lightning lit up the sky. He saw his own face above the bubbling wound—the same delicate features and the same blue eyes, now glazed in death. Thunder boomed, and warm rain

began to lash his suddenly trembling body drenching him to the skin.

"Melita!" he sobbed, oblivious of everything else, comprehending instantly how ring and clothes had conspired to mislead him. For some reason—possibly criminal guilt—she had wished to be thought dead. Some tragic accident to another girl who resembled her must have provided just the right kind of opportunity for the carrying out of an identity switch which had deceived even the police.

"Oh, Melita, why didn't you let *me* know you were alive!"

At that moment the other man, racing up, crashed the pipe with all his strength against Rudi's head.

The next lightning stroke found the street deserted except for the two sprawling figures, both face up in the rain. The man in skirt and sweater, the slender girl in slacks.

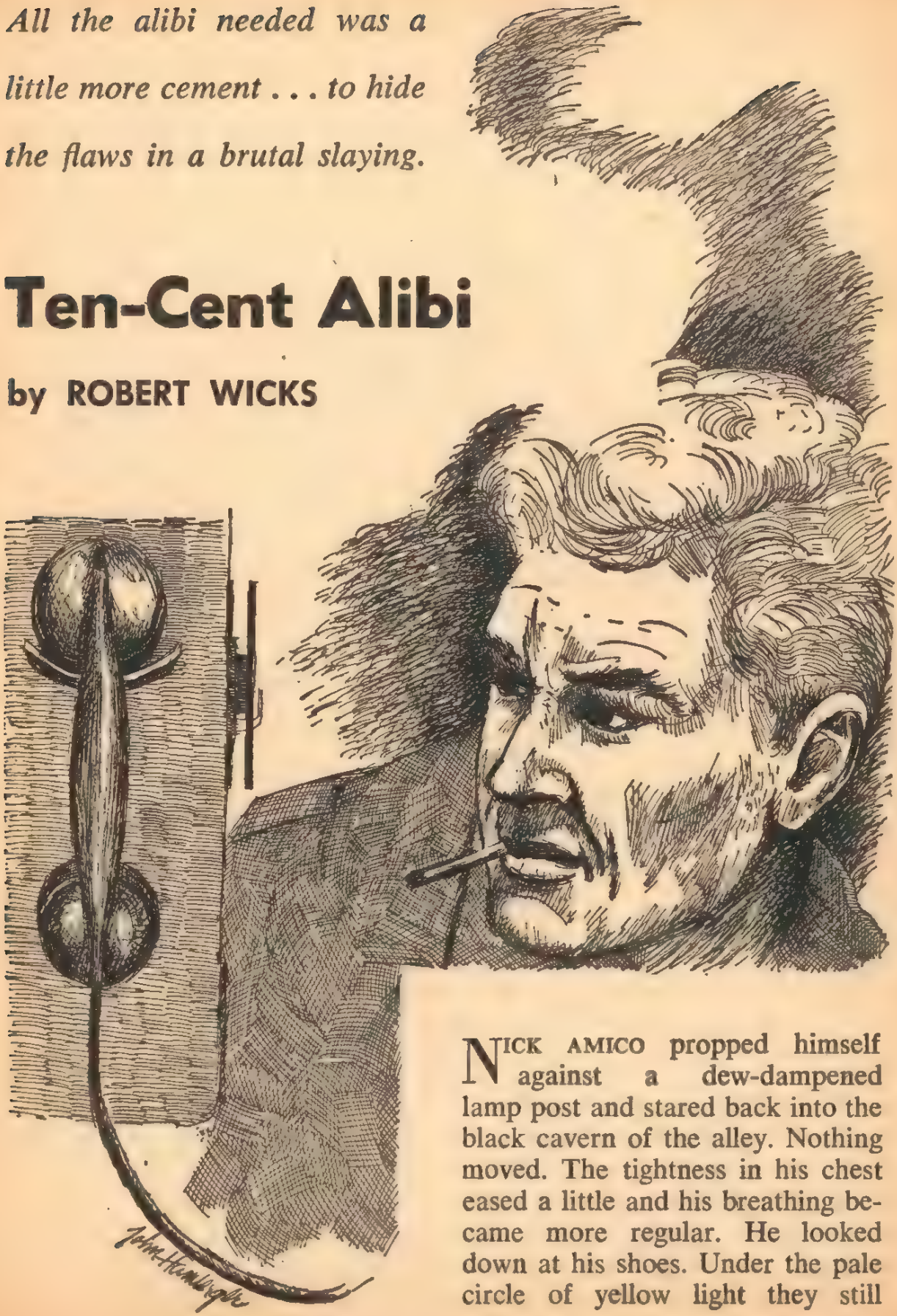
"DEATH OF A FLACK" by Henry Kane

A brand-new Peter Chambers Complete Novel Next Month

All the alibi needed was a little more cement . . . to hide the flaws in a brutal slaying.

Ten-Cent Alibi

by ROBERT WICKS



NICK AMICO propped himself against a dew-dampened lamp post and stared back into the black cavern of the alley. Nothing moved. The tightness in his chest eased a little and his breathing became more regular. He looked down at his shoes. Under the pale circle of yellow light they still

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shone with a patent-leather gleam.

Why not he thought, grinning inwardly. *I get me maybe fifteen free shines a week running numbers. Only, Augie ain't gonna be around no more to slap the sole of my shoe and say, "There, 'Alibi,' you can see your face in 'em now."*

He ceased to gloat suddenly, becoming conscious again of the weight of the switchblade in his coat pocket. *Got to get rid of it,* he told himself. Straightening up he glanced down the street in both directions. No traffic.

At a corner he slipped the knife into a paper-clogged storm drain. Under another lamp post he paused to glance at his watch. He frowned, his mind working with cautious calculation. *Three hours to go before the shops open. Got to do a fade out till then, and come up with a chrome-plated alibi.*

He grinned again. The circle he moved in didn't call him 'Alibi' Amico just to flatter him. His motto? *Always make it perfect!* But there hadn't been time to plan this one. No noisy and over-crowded party to slip away from and return to undetected. No theater ticket stubs to back up a friend's story that they had gone to the show together.

And only three hours to rig up something—less, if the boys with the silver badges picked him up sooner.

His mind went back to the last time they had tried to book him. He could still see Detective Lieutenant Nelson's fat, rumpled face and the lawyer arriving with the writ. Nelson had been all set to hustle Nick from station to station.

Nelson had turned the writ slowly over in his hand, his voice edged with anger and contempt. "They equipping lawyers with radar these days?" Then he'd turned and glared at Nick. "Look, mister. One of these days you're going to show up with an alibi that's got a hole in it too wide to plug. And we're going to get you up in front of a jury. With that reputation of yours they won't even have to leave the box."

Nick had grinned. "You ain't even found grounds to book me yet."

"One little hole," Nelson had flung back warningly. *"Just one."*

Headlights bathed the side of a building, and narrowed down to two bright discs as a car braked to a stop on a side street. With instant wariness Nick darted into an all-night cafe.

A sleepy-eyed man in a soiled chef's cap looked up as he came through the swinging doors, and headed for the counter.

"Coffee—black." Nick pushed a crumpled dollar across the counter. "And some dimes right now."

The man took the bill, rang up ten cents on the cash register and handed Nick a fistful of change. Nick collected the money and slipped into a phone booth.

The overhead light didn't work. *So much the better,* thought Nick. He fed a dime into the box and dialed a number. The phone on the other end buzzed in his ear. It buzzed eight times. Then he heard the receiver lift.

"Yeah?" said a low voice.

"Hi, Marvin," Nick answered.

"Amico?"

"Yeah."

"Trouble?""

"Same as before. Guy's name was August Fromm.

"It just came over the radio car alert. I just happened to be listening in. You still loose?"

"So far. Can you serve a writ on 'em before they can play musical jails with me?"

"No sweat. I got an ear at the precinct. Hope you got a good alibi."

"I'll get me one."

"See you in jail," the lawyer said and hung up.

Nick pressed the phone cradle down for a moment, then dropped another dime down the chute and fingered the dial. The phone buzzed longer this time.

"What the hell time is it?" a sleepy voice demanded.

"It's morning," said Nick.

He heard the sliding of metal on wood. A pause. Then, with angry reproach: "Six o'clock. A helluva time to wake a guy up."

"Look, Steve, I got myself into a little trouble."

"This you, Amico? Is it about Augie Fromm? I was afraid you might try to—"

"Hey, careful!"

"Take it easy. This is one line that isn't bugged."

"He was holding out on the take," Nick explained. "Claimed he had to pay off the cop on the beat."

"Maybe he did."

"Then why didn't he say so before?"

"Don't seem like much of a reason to get the cops down on us again. What did you do? Never mind—don't tell me. I've got a pretty good idea. You don't carry a rod, so I expect it was a knife job—"

"Well, one thing led to another. Cops will probably be there to question you."

"You know better than that, Amico."

"Yeah, you got friends."

"Let's say I'm a respected citizen."

"That's why I called you, Steve. I need a water-tight alibi. If you was to come forward, and say I was with you all night—"

"Look, Amico. I told all you runners I don't get mixed up in these things. I've made that plain enough—time and time again. I've got enough worries as it is."

Nick's mouth went dry. "Yeah, I know. But Steve, I gotta have somebody to back me up—somebody who pulls a little weight where it counts."

"I thought you always had a perfect alibi."

"Look, Steve, this thing just—well, it just went out of control. I gotta work fast before they pull me in."

There was a long pause on the other end of the line. Nick was standing very still, listening to his heart pound, when the answer finally came.

"Like I said, Nick, I don't get mixed up in these things. It's too goddamned risky."

The receiver clicked in Nick's ear.

Another dime and he was listening to the buzzing again.

"Hello." It was a woman's voice this time—yawning, husky.

"Hi, Flo. This is Nick Amico. Hope I didn't get you out of bed.

"No, I was just brewing up some coffee. It's Monday, you know." Monday I like to get out of the house for the whole day. Go to the park, a movie. You know."

Monday, Nick thought, seeing a way to play it to his advantage.

"That's why I called you so early," he said quickly. "I thought maybe you'd like to go out somewhere with me."

She laughed. "Well, you haven't exactly been a steady caller these past few weeks. I'd about decided you'd written the place off."

"Nothing like that. 'Course, if you don't want to go out with me . . ."

"You're not kidding? I mean, you really want to, and you understand it really is my day off?"

"Sure. We'll just go out for a good time. Maybe a boat ride around the harbor, or out to the island."

There was a short pause, before Flo capitulated. "All right, hon. Give me an hour to shower, and get dressed, eh?"

"Sure thing. Oh, while I think of it. Lieutenant Nelson hasn't been around looking for me, has he?"

"No. Should he be?"

"Well, I hear there was a little scrape down the boulevard a short while ago. He might be checking around on all the guys."

This time the pause was longer. "And what should I tell him if he does come around?"

"Well, I don't know. Just to be on the safe side you might tell him I spent the night there, and just stepped out for a shave. If he still wants to see me, I'll be right back."

"You know, Nick," she said, "you almost had me believing you really wanted to go out with me."

"I do, baby, I do!"

"Goodbye, Nick."

"Wait a minute, Flo—"

"I've done all the waiting I intend to do for you. See you around—during business hours."

"But if Nelson—"

"That's *your* problem. I think I'll go to the zoo, and watch the monkeys in the cages."

The click in Amico's ear was quiet but firm.

Another dime, another voice—old, tired.

"Hello."

"Hi, Pop."

"That you, Angelo?"

"Nope. Nick."

"Nick?" The old man seemed puzzled. "What do you want?"

Nick tried, without success, to put a chuckle in his voice. "Now, what kind of way is that to greet your own son?"

The old man measured his words out slowly, but with an embittered vehemence. "I only got one son. His name's Angelo."

"Pop, it's been three years. Three long years. Time we unmuddied the waters between us. I ain't just a kid stealing cars anymore. That's all in the past. I'm getting to be a big man now. You probably read about me in the papers."

"I don't have to read about you. I know all about you just from the way folks greet me around the neighborhood."

"Pop, I'm kinda, well—a business man now." He had to clear his throat. "I got me a little money set aside. I could do a lot of things for you—things a son ought to do for his dad."

"I know how you get your money. It just came in over the radio. All about knifing."

The phone was wet in Nick's hand. "That's what I really called you about. Has Lieutenant Nelson been around to talk to you?"

"No, but he will be. He calls at least once a week now. Like my neighbors, he thinks you hide out here when the dogs are barking."

"Look, Pop. I didn't have nothing to do with that knifing. But the cops have to be convinced. And, well, I can't account for where I was when it happened. If you was to say I spent the night there and get Angelo to back you up."

"Why should I?"

"Pop, I'm your son, your own flesh and—"

"I only got one son. Name's Angelo. A good boy."

"But, Pop!"

"Good luck, Nick—and goodbye."

Amico slowly replaced the phone. Who else? Not any of the runners. Their word would be worse than no alibi. Maybe if he tried Flo again.

There was no answer when he dialed Flo's number. He tried Steve again. No answer. Pop—no answer.

He remained standing very still in the phone booth for a long time. Finally, he went to the restroom. He washed up as best he could with liquid soap and paper towels, straightened his tie, smoothed his lapels and returned to the counter.

Lighting a cigarette, he stared into the shiny blackness of his coffee cup. Now what? Beat it out of town? They'd have every route covered.

He pulled on his cigarette. *No,* he thought. *Steve was right. They got nothing on me. No evidence. No witnesses.*

The tension went out of him. His fears of the night were being dispelled by the brightness of morning. *For the first time I won't have an alibi. I don't need one. So Nelson books me. If he does, the judge at the hearing will have to toss the case out. I'll never have to face a jury in a town that hates the name, Amico. So where are you, Nelson?* He picked up his cup. *I'm waiting.*

As if in answer, the door swung open. A cold shock wave enveloped Nick's stomach. Lieutenant Nelson, flanked by two uniformed police sergeants, stood there quietly regarding him.

"Hello, Nick." Nelson said, sitting down on the stool next to him. "Coffee smells good." The detective caught the eye of the man in the chef's hat. "Cream and sugar."

"Look, Nelson," Amico said. "I just heard about it on the radio. I didn't have nothing to do with it. This time I'm clean. I don't even carry a knife anymore." Held up his hands. "You can search me."

The detective smiled and stirred his coffee.

"Look, we were the best of friends." Nick's mind raced. "I got an alibi," he stammered.

"I know," Nelson was still smiling. "We been checking up on you. You got a *perfect* alibi."

Nick felt his stomach relax. He picked up his cup again, sipped his coffee. He avoided looking at the detective.

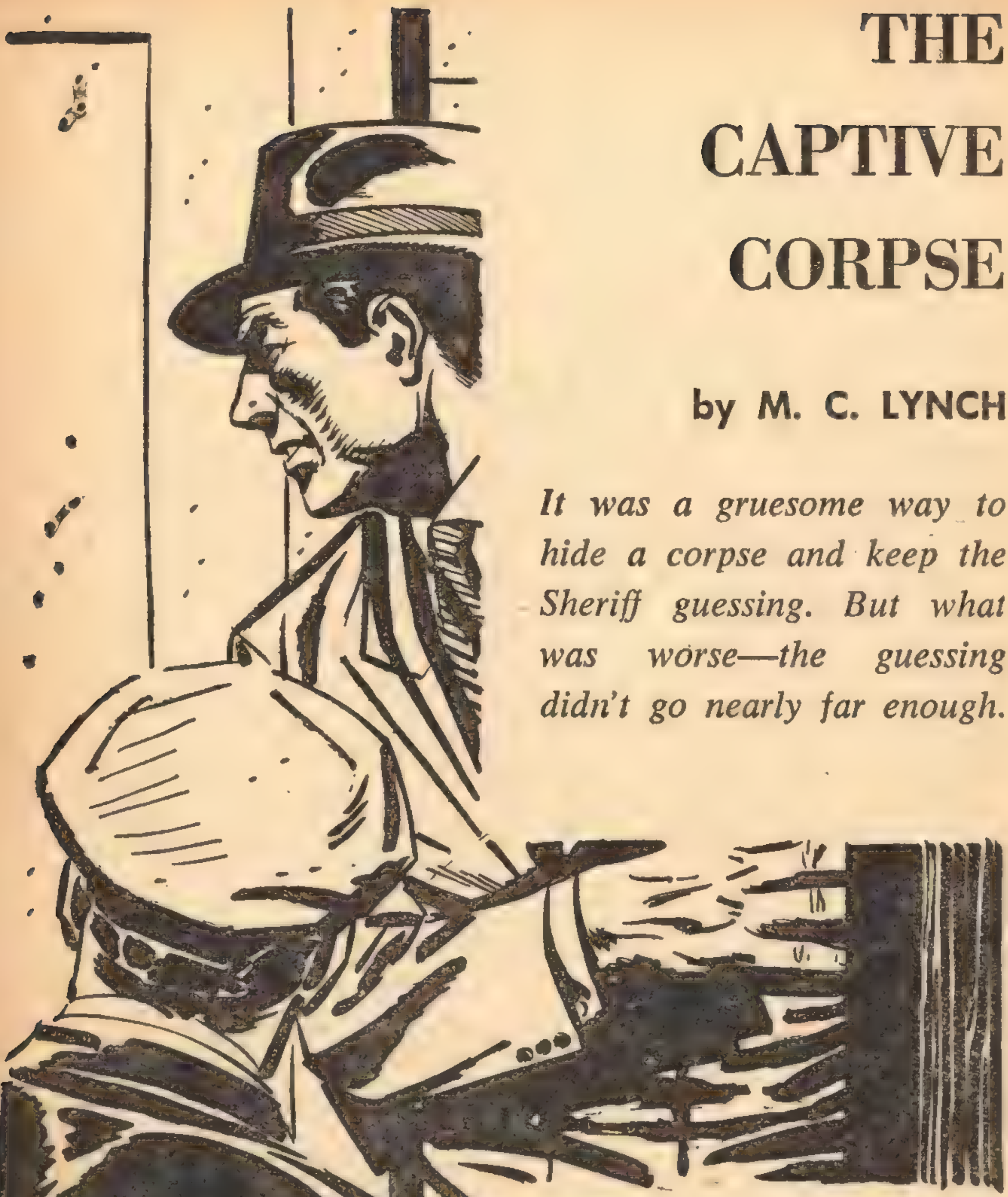
"In fact," Nelson continued, "you got the most perfect alibi I've ever heard. You slept all night in three different places!"

Nick swallowed. His coffee was cold.

THE ONLY MAGAZINE featuring MIKE SHAYNE every month

THE CAPTIVE CORPSE

by M. C. LYNCH



It was a gruesome way to hide a corpse and keep the Sheriff guessing. But what was worse—the guessing didn't go nearly far enough.

I REALLY FEEL bad about that girl from the newspaper. Fresh from college, she was—all eager and hopeful. Talking about getting my "story" like I was some kind of oracle. Waiting, with her

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pencils all sharpened nice and neat, for me to say something she could write down.

Seeing as I'd retired from being the sheriff after forty-five years, she'd explained without giving me a chance to get a word in edgewise, she was going to do what she called a "feature article" about me.

I knew what she wanted. I was supposed to tell her a lot of hair-raising yarns about my experiences. Most of 'em had been just plain dull. Routine stuff. I told her that, and it didn't take long for her face to stop looking so bright.

"But surely there was one case that stands out in your mind," she said. "Something special, out of the ordinary."

Well, there was one like that. But I didn't feel like telling her about it. When I look back on those forty-five years, the thing that sticks in my memory is the time we broke into the house next door to try to take the dead body of Charlie Wilson away from his wife. And even after all this time, remembering it gives me—well, a funny feeling.

When it happened, the Wilsons were new people in town. And when I say "New," I don't mean living in these parts a long time but not born here, the way folks are still considered outsiders if their families don't go way back. The Wilsons were real new. Practically foreigners, from the local point of view.

There were a good many of them in those days. It was during the last war. The Government had taken over the old mill down by the river to make G.I. underwear, and there was more work than the folks in town could handle. So a lot of strangers came here to live.

The house next door to us had been vacant a long time before the Wilson couple rented it. It was an old place with some furniture in it. Millie, my wife, saw them move in and all they had with them, she said, were a couple of suitcases. Millie's house-proud, and right away she started feeling sorry for Mrs. Wilson.

Truth is, it was a funny set-up —at least it seemed that way to us. Mrs. Wilson got a job in the mill, and worked long hours. She kept her house neat, too. Millie, who manages to get a line on everybody no matter who they are, went calling right off the bat. She said Mrs. Wilson was a good housekeeper, and she ought to know. She's an expert on things like that, and practically everything else that isn't strictly a man's concern.

You'd wonder how Pauline Wilson could do so much, since she was so little and looked as if a good strong wind would blow her away. Her husband didn't do anything at all. I don't just mean that he had no job and let his wife

support him. You never saw him around the yard raking leaves or hauling out the rubbish or doing any household chores.

It was Pauline who did those things, even after a hard day's work. The winter they were here, we had a couple of bad snowstorms. Pauline was the one that shoveled the walk. Charlie, as far as we could figure out, didn't do anything but lie around the house all day and all night.

Like I said, Millie pitied Mrs. Wilson. And she'd gotten mighty het up about that lazy slob of a husband. A few times she went over to ask Pauline to go to the women's club meetings they're always having at church. She got refused every time. Mrs. Wilson said it was out of the question.

"When I get home at night," she said. "I like to spend the evening with my husband. He's in poor health, you know."

Millie figured the excuse was just a cover-up for the man's being good for nothing. There are women like that. They'll work their fingers to the bone and be glad to do it for some big lazy lummox. That's what Millie claims anyway. And like I said, she's an expert.

After she got snubbed a few times, Millie said she wasn't going to try to be friendly any more. But she didn't really mean it. She'd made a big batch of her peanut butter cookies one Saturday morning and she couldn't keep from going over and offering some of 'em to Pauline.

That's Millie. All talk, but kind-hearted underneath. Saturday, her day off, there was that little woman still working like a slave. Millie couldn't stand it. She had to go over.

Millie didn't get in, though. Other times, Mrs. Wilson would come to the door at least, and sometimes she'd invite Millie into the hall. But not this time. Millie knocked and knocked at the front door, and then went around to the back. It was a cold day and she was standing there shivering. But she wouldn't give up. She can be as stubborn as all get-out, and she could see the Wilsons' old car in the garage and knew they hadn't gone anywhere.

After five minutes or more, she saw Pauline Wilson's face peek out of the kitchen window. She held up the plate with the napkin over it to show what she wanted. But Pauline just looked at her. With no expression on her face, Millie said. Just looked and shook her head. She kept shaking it and shaking it and when she started to let the curtain drop, Millie yelled, "Mrs. Wilson! What's the matter?"

"He's dead. Charlie's dead." Her voice was so low Millie had to read her lips to find out what she was saying. "Charlie died last night."

Now more than ever, Millie wanted to get in there. She knew Pauline needed help. A woman alone like that, losing the one she loved better than anything else in the world, a stranger in town and all. But no matter how much she pounded on the doors, front and back, and yelled at the top of her lungs, Pauline didn't come back to the window.

Millie called me up after a while.

"There's something terrible scary about it." I could hear the shiver in her voice. "Think of it—her locked up in there with a dead man. She said he died during the night and that's a long time ago now. She must be in a state of shock. And she might do something desperate—try to kill herself, I mean."

I told her to calm down. I said death affects people in strange ways sometimes. Maybe, I said, she just wanted to be alone with him for a while. To mourn in private.

"She'll snap out of it pretty soon," I told her. "It's just that it's been a shock, like you said."

But when I went home for lunch, it was still like that. Millie was standing in front of the Wilsons' house with a few of her women friends. They were taking turns calling out to Pauline. But her house looked locked up tight and they weren't getting any answer to their yelling.

When Millie saw me, she rushed over and grabbed my arm. "You got to do something, Sim!" she cried. "We can't leave her alone in there with a dead body."

The trouble was, I didn't know just what to do. Nothing like that had ever come up before. I figured if we broke into the house, it would terrify Pauline and might be just enough to set her over the edge, the way she'd been acting. It was a touchy business, and it had me stumped.

"Give her another little while," I said to the women. "By the time night comes, she'll probably snap out of it."

Night came and there was no sign of life anywhere in the house, except for a light that began to show in the second floor window, where they must have had their bedroom. But it was just a faint light, and I figured she was using candles.

We stood out there on their front lawn looking up, and I never felt so helpless. There were quite a few of us now. The word had spread around town that Pauline Wilson had locked herself up with her dead husband, and by dark there must have been fifty or sixty people, hanging around the lawn and the sidewalk in front of the house. Cars were parked along the street, too.

I tried to keep 'em cleared off, but they kept driving by slowly with faces peering out, and drivers

craning their necks to look up at that bedroom window.

It was a very cold night. You could see people's breath—like white smoke it was—and hear feet stamping on the ground and hands being beat together. Everybody was orderly—excited but quiet. Voices were held down to whispers. The faces, turned up to that flickering light in the second floor, were sober.

Like Millie had said, it was scary. Pauline moved across in front of the window once, and we saw her shadow looking bigger than a giant's. There was a hissing sound as people pulled in their breaths.

Everybody was looking to me to do something, but I couldn't decide what to do. There must have been a law about keeping a corpse in a house like that, but I'd never run across it. Still, I had to take some action.

"In the morning," I said at last when somebody asked me when I was going to break in and get Charlie Wilson's body. "If she don't come out by then, I'll bust down the door."

It was after midnight before I managed to talk all of them into going home.

The first thing Millie did when she got out of bed the following morning was run to the window and look out at the house next door. She said she was going to try to call Pauline on the telephone. She did her best, but the operator rang and rang and there was no answer.

We went to church. Millie's one of the pillars. We met Mr. Morse, the minister, on the way in, and Millie grabbed him and began to talk about our neighbor who had spent twenty-four hours alone with her husband's corpse. He'd already heard about it, Mr. Morse assured her. And although Mrs. Wilson wasn't a member of his church and hadn't let him in when he'd gone to call on her a few weeks ago, he'd lead the congregation in special prayers for her.

"That isn't enough." Millie was a bundle of nerves, close to tears. "I want you to come with us, just as soon as church is over. Maybe she'll listen to you."

That day, nobody in the congregation paid much attention to the services, except for the part where Mr. Morse led the prayers for "the poor bereaved soul who cannot accept the will of God."

And right after the final prayer, everybody made a beeline to the Wilsons' house.

Millie told me afterward that Mr. Morse didn't get anywhere at all when he tired to get Pauline to let him in. After a while he had to give up. I wasn't there. I heard about what went on that day second-hand because I was busy somewhere else. Bad luck often comes in triplicate, the town had to come up with a crime wave

right then. Bill, one of my deputies, came looking for me after church services and told me the news.

A gas station down at the village had been broken into during the night. And that wasn't all. There were a couple of stores that kept open late on Saturday nights, because business was good until midnight with the mill running overtime and a lot of spending going on.

When the news spread around town about the gas station burglary, the men who owned the stores—Jake Allen and Horace Orr—rushed to check the money they'd left in their safes over the week-end. In both cases, the safes had been cracked open and cleaned out.

Like I said, I was busy that Sunday, mostly listening to Jake and Horace squawking about the inefficiency of the town's law officers. I called the State Police for help with fingerprinting and such. But it was a bad Sunday with a big traffic accident out on the Turnpike and some inmates at the prison trying to pull a riot. So nobody got around to covering everything that day.

When I finally got home, I found that nothing had changed in the situation next door. Night was coming on again, which would mean that Pauline Wilson had been keeping her vigil for almost forty-eight hours.

The crowd in front of the house was bigger than ever. All day people had come and gone, Millie told me—almost like it was some sort of tourist attraction. There were even some curiosity-seekers from neighboring towns and a couple of guys from a newspaper, one of 'em with a camera. He made some crack about getting a ladder and taking a picture through the Wilsons' bedroom window. But I wasn't allowing that, and I threatened to have him thrown in the jug if he tried it.

I was getting madder by the minute. Those burglaries down in the village had burned me up and I didn't like the way some of the people in the crowd were beginning to act, the women clucking their teeth at me and pointing me out like I was some sort of a blundering freak.

It was tough getting rid of them all that night. It was black as pitch and colder than a polar bear's ears out there on the lawn. But nobody wanted to go home.

Finally, I got up on the front porch and made a kind of speech. I shouted good and loud, so they could hear me way out on the sidewalk. I hoped my voice would carry inside the house, too, and that Pauline would get what I was saying.

"All of this crowding and staring isn't helping anything," I yelled. "We're Mrs. Wilson's friends. It's our neighborly duty to

have some consideration for her. I'm not going to bother her tonight. But in the morning, I'll take some action."

There was a little murmur that went through the crowd and then everybody became quiet.

"What I'm going to do," I went on, loud as I could make my voice, "is get an order from the Board of Health and draw up a warrant to break in. Now I want you all to go home and stay there. There's no call for you to come back here again."

I might just as well have saved my breath. They did go home, finally. But most of them were back in the morning, even before me and Millie were out of bed. I couldn't spend any time on Pauline Wilson that morning, either. Already calls were coming in from all over town.

What had happened was that there had been a big rash of burglaries during the night, private homes this time. It wasn't only the big houses that were broken into —Jasper Crane's and a couple of others with expensive things in them to tempt a thief. A lot of ordinary people had been hit, too. With all the prosperity in town, some folks kept fairly large sums of money at home, not being used to banks and being careful on principle.

So I was rushing around all morning. The fingerprint boys

COMPLETE IN THE NEXT ISSUE

DEATH OF A FLACK

THE NEW PETER CHAMBERS NOVEL

by HENRY KANE

No downbeat murder victim had ever antagonized a wider variety of off-beat people. So violence and explosiveness made the orchestration very special. Suspense in major key, by a mystery writer of Cain-Chandler stature and prestige.

from the State Police showed up. I was talking to the women whose houses had been broken into; the men were at work and I've never run into a woman yet who couldn't use ten words where a man could say it in one.

All in all, it was afternoon before I got to running down Chet Stewart, the Board of Health officer, over at the county seat.

Chet came back to town with me. When we got to the Wilsons', even berore I got my feet out of the car, Millie rushed up to me. She was all excited, but that wasn't anything surprising. She'd been like somebody sitting on hot nails since Saturday morning.

"Not now," I told her, "Chet and me have got a job to do."

Bill, my deputy, was there, too. He pushed through the crowd and elbowed Millie aside. Him I had to listen to. He'd been working on the burglaries all day and, as a matter of fact, he did have something important to tell me. He'd gone into an old abandoned shack up in the hills and found what he called some "evidence."

"Somebody's been sleeping up there lately. Even left a blanket behind," Bill said. "There was one of them kerosene heaters and it looked like it had been used recently. And there were some scraps of food, not even stale. Couldn't make out any footprints because the ground is frozen hard. But the brush around the shack was broken down, like a car might have driven up to it."

"One thing at a time," I growled at him. "When I get through here I'll take a run up there with you. Right now, I got something to do here."

It was a job I didn't care for. You can't tell what some folks will do when they're crazy with grief. But it was my duty and it had to be gotten over with. So I gave Chet the nod and we went up the front steps.

The crowd became very quiet all of a sudden. People moved a little closer on the lawn, watching us but not saying anything. When we reached the door, I made one last attempt to persuade Pauline to come and let us in. I yelled that we were going to bust in and that she might as well open up. There was no answer.

I said to Chet, "Well, I guess we have to do it."

We stood close together, and heaved our shoulders against the door at the same time. The wood held but the second time we tried it we heard something splinter around the lock. With the third try, the door gave way and we almost fell into the hall.

The place was all dark and gloomy, as if the curtains had been pulled down in all the rooms. Chet took out his cigarette lighter and found a switch on the wall. We went upstairs, Chet a step or two behind me. Except for our

feet sounding on the bare wood, the place was dead still. That's what it seemed like—a house of the dead.

When we got to the second floor, Chet was still in back of me. I turned to the front of the house and stopped at the door there. I said softly, "Mrs. Wilson!"

Still no answer. I waited a couple of minutes and then went in.

The room was empty. Not a soul in it. And nothing much in the way of furniture except a scabby old bed and a couple of wooden chairs and a table by the window. On the table I found the stubs of two candles in empty whisky bottles.

It began to dawn on me then. I went to the closet and saw that there was nothing in it. Everything that had belonged to the Wilsons had been taken away.

After a while, we gave up looking around and went back outside. Millie grabbed me right off. What she'd been trying to tell me was that she'd looked in the garage that morning and seen that the Wilsons' car wasn't there.

We never did catch Pauline Wilson and her husband. They'd had a good head start on us. Some time during the night before, she must have gone and picked him up at the shack and off they went with the loot he'd stolen from the stores and the houses he'd broken into.

Oh, we made it easy for them all right! Falling for her story about him being dead in there. Hanging around in front of the house while he was pulling off those burglaries. And me letting her know when we were going to bust in, giving her a good warning in advance.

Now you can see why I didn't say anything about that case to the girl from the newspaper.

A NEW COMPLETE MIKE SHAYNE STORY NEXT MONTH

UNDERCOVER MAN

by

THOMAS CALVERT McCLARY

McLeod expected to rub elbows with Death at some point in his investigations . . . for the drug-traffic octopus had long tentacles.

AT EIGHT MINUTES past five p.m. precisely, Frank McLeod swung into the rushing river of human flesh and let the current jostle him down the stairs and through the hungry, clacking jaws of the subway turnstile.

On the narrow platform, he swung sharply out of the crowd and stood for a moment watching the faces of those who followed. It crossed his mind that he was getting to know too many faces in the glamor belt. For every face that he knew, a pair of eyes, if they were sharp, also knew him.

And that was not good, not good at all, for a Special Prosecutor's undercover man!

He saw a florist girl, two hat check girls, and three waiters from cocktail spas that he knew. None looked at him, so that was no sweat. A fourth man he didn't

© 1960, by Thomas Calvert McClary

A DRAMATIC AND TIMELY NOVELET

know dropped a penny in the gum machine and looked straight at him as he thumbed off the wrapper. A squat, ugly-looking bruiser with faint, mauve circles under his glossy black eyes.

Hophead, McLeod thought with distaste, and the anger of frustration rolled through him like distant thunder in the Catskills.

The man popped the gum into his mouth and drifted southward on the platform. McLeod bought a paper and moved with the crowd as a train roared in, but cut out of it to stand behind a post until the doors had closed. For that brief instant, he could see who was on the platform. The hophead had caught the train. McLeod moved to a waiting bench and sat to scan his paper.

After two or three minutes, he fished a cigarette from his pocket absently, and murmured to the iron grey man beside him, "Got a match?"

The grey man let his gaze drift through the freshening crowd, and handed him a pack. At the same time, he slipped McLeod a sheaf of tightly folded bills. "Chief says it would have been cheaper to send you to Monte Carlo," he grunted.

"Tell him I'd settle for Coney Island!" McLeod rasped. He lighted up and handed the matches back, except that it was a different pack. "Couple of new wholesaler names. Nothing more," he said. His lips barely moved as he spoke, his voice was scarcely audible, but his tone held a bite.

The grey man looked at him. "Things getting rough?"

"Things ain't getting nowhere!" McLeod said. "No action at all."

"Don't count on it," the grey man muttered. "Somebody's been nosing through our personnel files."

Another train roared in. The grey man got up. "See you next Monday at Staten Island ferry."

"No contact until then?"

"Don't even phone unless you can come in with the case wrapped up."

His S.P. contact, Riley Grimes, faded into the crowd with amazing dexterity, like a chameleon. The train moved out of the station, its rumble fading along the tunnel. McLeod felt the loneliness settle down on him again. Loneliness and frustration. It was a bad combination.

Thank God for Ellen Adams' company! At least she broke up the monotony of hanging around with nothing but mobsters, cafe society, and rich screwballs. But even with her, he was playing an act so that her company was like his Jaguar—nice to drive, but not his own. At the end of this case, it went back to the rental agency. And Ellen would go back to her world of orchids and mink coats.

He folded his paper, rammed it in his pocket, and frowned at the crowd that ebbed and flowed. His

experienced eyes picked out at least four junkies, the newcomers to the mainline showing their frenzied hungers the sharpest. Eyes glittering, mouths tight drawn, they rushed with desperate need to get their evening's fix.

For that drugged escape from reality for a few hours, they would lie to their families, steal from their best friends, cheat their companies. Eventually, most of them would sell their bodies or their souls to pay the cost of their addiction. Some would commit murder before they ended in the river or on a mortuary slab.

And more and more, every year now, every month, the harsh signs were showing on younger and younger people.

The police could knock off a hundred pushers, but it wouldn't stop the vicious flow of heroin through every stratum of the city. Nothing short of breaking Bellows could break the racket. The Special Prosecutor had put McLeod on undercover for that task exclusively now. But in four months he had uncovered nothing—not one clue—as to Bellows' methods of city wide communication and distribution.

Without a really hot, crackdown kind of lead the S.P. could raid a pile of junk and punks he already knew about. And the racket would run right on, with hardly a ripple.

Somewhere, McLeod thought savagely, he had goofed. Either they had read through his act and knew who he was, and were secretly laughing at him. Or his act of an amateur pusher who ran around with the rich play-crowd had been *too* good, and they had decided he was too much of an amateur to risk in the Big Time.

There was a third possible alternative—that the Red Lounge was the wrong spot, the wrong part of the operation, in which to acquire the information he needed. But he couldn't see how that could be.

The Lounge was the money-drop, the bank where the wholesalers brought their loot, and, by the same token, must leave their orders. And it was the place where they must learn where to pick up their supplies, for the delivery spots changed with every shipment.

No, damn it, somewheres he had goofed, and he'd rather be dead than goof on this one! It was dope that had wrecked his father's life and health, turning a strong-willed, good and generous man into a pitiful human wreck before death took him.

Another train came in, and he rode it to the next express stop. He wove from the outgoing crowd into the one headed for the downtown trains. As he crossed the overpass he looked down upon the platform, and thought he saw the same man who had bought the slot-machine gum.

Anger, frustration and tension surged inside of him. He thought of testing the man, of leading him on if he were quite certain he was one of Bellows' goons. God, what a relief it would be just to sink his fist into a beefy stomach and maul one of those rats until he coughed up the truth!

But what could he learn, even if he went that far? Bellows would not be putting top-level secrets into the hands of his roughnecks. That would be too risky.

McLeod suppressed his rage with an effort. He faded out of the platform's line of vision, out of the crowd, and went upstairs to grab a cab downtown.

HE STOPPED AT Vic Tanay's for a workout and massage and lay on a table the space of a cigarette, trying to figure what was wrong. The question mark ran around the inside of his head like a squirrel in a cage. There was no answer and he knew it because he'd done nothing wrong.

He'd hit the Red Lounge first as an out-of-town playboy, or at least, one of the leeches who live off them. He'd been careful not to act mysterious or secret or super-smart. He'd asked for Moira Savoy, who'd been dead for two months, but whose remains had not been located.

The name had startled the mob and made them curious. But no D.A.'s man would bust in and ask for her straight out like that, so it was taken for granted that he'd hoped for some racket connection with her, and didn't know that she'd been trapped as a stool pigeon.

A tough, albino-eyed Irish gunman had tried to trip him by claiming that nobody had heard or seen Moira for a year. McLeod had shown proper heat at the statement and had said it was a lie, because he had been swimming with her in California only three months before. Not only that. He had spoken with her after her return, on a day when she'd just come home from the Lounge.

The gunman had grinned and bought him a drink, and that had been that. He'd kept his business with Moira to himself and made no leading remarks about dope, and Al Logan, cashier for Bellows, was the one who had made friends with him. McLeod had pushed nothing.

He got Ellen Adams on his string unexpectedly. Five years before, through his connection with the D.A. he had saved her brother from a circumstantial armed felony charge and steered the boy into better company, and she'd been grateful.

He had phoned her this time, not even sure that she'd care to go out with him. Five years ago, she hadn't known exactly what his connection with the D.A. was, but she had known he was dirt poor

from her Park Avenue penthouse standpoint.

Somewhat to his surprise, she'd not only remembered him and taken him in tow for an evening on the town, but she'd adopted him ever since.

Of course, the Jaguar might have something to do with it. Or his story that he'd made a killing on the stock market, with the implication that he was rich. He certainly threw money around that way on this job! Yet he was beginning to feel that she really liked him.

Without knowing it, she'd been his chief passport with the Bellows mob. They knew her, and about her, of course, as one of the prettier and wittier fixtures of cafe society. She both showed him around and introduced him right into the top echelons. She was a perfect fit for his current undercover needs—and no girl could be prettier while he was at it.

Even after he hooked up with Ellen, which eased the mob's suspicions of him, he had tread very soft and cautiously. He'd put out no leaders to find out anything. He'd let everything originate with them. He'd even waited a full five weeks to lose the dog-eared address book in the men's room—the book listing about seventy of the wealthier playcrowd on both coasts.

Three days after McLeod had lost the book, he was asked if he'd lost anything and while answering, identified it. It was returned without comment as having been found by the sweeper. He made no comment himself, although he suspected that Al Logan had his ear hanging out for some crack.

All of that had been played smooth and cool. There might have been some small bug in the Sonny Harlow incident, however. Sonny was a rich wild hophead whom he'd met with Ellen at the Aigrette, and whom he'd built a drinking friendship with since then.

One night he'd bumped into Sonny with a large crowd just in from yachting, all higher than standing jockies on Horse. He'd been swept into the party and in turn, swept the party into the Red Lounge.

Al Logan hadn't liked it. He knew them, and couldn't kick them out, but they couldn't leave fast enough to suit him. Later he'd told McLeod, "I should have knocked your damnfool head off! What if some smart narcotic cop had picked that crowd up in here!"

McLeod made a gesture of apology. "They were drinking too. I figured I was doing the place a good turn."

"Mac," Al told him, his stubby finger puncturing the words into McLeod's chest, "don't ever bring a hopped up cokie or a deck of the stuff in here! Understand? Just don't do it."

McLeod made the only slip he'd

made to that date. "I'm just trying to keep them rounded up until I can supply them regularly," he explained.

Al had given him a long steady look. McLeod could almost hear the wheels whirring inside the man's head. Logan was going over every remark McLeod had ever made, or that had been credited to him—for the mob had an astonishing Gestapo of its own.

"So that's why you wanted Moira?" Al asked softly.

"Well—" McLeod muttered and spread his hands. "I don't know New York too well, and I don't know the racket here at all."

"You seem to know the wrong people," Al Logan chuckled suddenly. "Which in that case, is the right people. But to go in business here, you'd have to see Mr. Sunshine."

That was Bellows. McLeod was getting near a break, and he had to sit on his hands and pound himself on top of his head, figuratively, to keep from blurting out some dangerously over-insistent demand.

Logan had a whole drink before he said anything else. Then he simply said, "Maybe we can pass the word along for you."

McLeod remembered that conversation down to the last inflection of voice, for he had searched for an item in it that might be used as court evidence, and found nothing. At no point, had Logan admitted knowing Bellows personally, or even Moira, and he'd said nothing suggesting that he was connected with narcotics. He was simply a broad-minded guy with some cautiously hinted at connections offering a favor to a friend.

And that had been the end of it. No sign or message from Bellows, and not another word on the subject out of Logan since then.

McLeod grated, "Hell!" and jammed out his cigarette and rolled off the gym's resting table. The workout hadn't done him one bit of good. The nerves were knotted in the back of his neck again the size of a goose egg.

MCLEOD WENT ON to his 57th Street hotel, changed into a tux, picked up his Jaguar at the garage, and drove around to park diagonally across from the inconspicuous front of the Red Lounge, which was down two steps near the middle of the block.

A stranger would have passed it without knowing it was a bar. He switched off the motor, rammed his knees forward under the dash, and sprawled back, so that the back of the seat pressed the base of his neck. He relaxed, and let his thoughts drift for a moment with his eyes closed.

He thought of the two remarks which the grey-haired Grimes had made earlier. *One,* that the Chief had labeled him expensive; *two,* that somebody had been prowling

through the D.A.'s personnel file. It had all the earmarks of a buildup for letting him down easy. They were going to pull him off the undercover job in a week or so.

He drew in a long, bitter breath and let it out explosively.

Ellen's voice said from right beside him, "Good Lord, you aren't drunk, are you?"

He sat up so quickly that his face collided with hers. She was leaning in, looking at him, and as long as her face was right there before him, he kissed her. It was, incidentally, the first kiss he'd garnered.

He said, "Drunks aren't responsible." Then, more soberly, "No, I'm just beat." He grinned broadly. "Hop in and I'll drive you."

"Later maybe," she said, and withdrew her head. "I'm only going to the Coq d'Or for dinner." He looked out at her and she was frowning across at the Red Lounge. "Why do you hang out with those moronic hoodlums," she asked. "No wonder you're tired. All they know anything about is baseball and horses. That isn't bad in itself, but you need wider interests."

"Oh, they talk fights, too," he said. "Am I seeing you tonight? I was going to phone."

"Late, if you like," she nodded. "But I'm going to give you a change of diet, and I'm going to drive. I've got a little old tumbledown shack in the Berkshires, and I'm going to drive you up and give you some fresh air and frozen trout for a change."

He squinted up at her, smiling, but feeling the ripples of surprise inside himself that she'd have anything so homey and simple. "Nice," he nodded. "Very nice. Ellen, you'd make a great wife. What in the hell are you doing single?"

She gave her deep-throated Sphinx laugh. She was back in her ultra-*chichi* character again. "No man I could tolerate could afford me," she said. She wiggled her fingers at him. "I'll pick you up here around midnight." She moved away looking like the front cover of a fashion magazine.

He shook his head to himself, already missing her after this assignment was over. She was a great girl—really the greatest. If he'd made the killing in the market he'd talked to her about, he wouldn't have minded spending every dime on her.

He felt better just from spending a few minutes with her. Even as a joke, that kiss hadn't done him any harm. But when he looked at the Lounge, all of the frustration and weariness came back with a vengeance. If there'd been danger in the job, action, or even just sparring, it would have keened him. But *this*—Damn, it was *just nothing!* It was getting him in mind and body and heart.

And still, the answers must be there, somewhere, right in front of

him. But he had goofed, and they were pulling him off the job. He felt sure of it.

He looked at the glove compartment where he kept his gun, frowned a moment, then left it there. If the occasion came to need a rod with this mob, he'd never get the chance to use it, anyway. They were too smooth and cool, and very finicky about bloodshed. They didn't want their rugs and curtains spotted.

He had set a pattern of visiting hours here, and this was out of it. Ordinarily, he'd have been cocktailing or dining at one of the big-name spots by now, all of which was duly reported through Bellows' Gestapo, he was nine-tenths sure.

Lonzo, the barkeep, looked over at him sharply as he came in. He detected an instant's surprise, and maybe caution, on Al Logan's face as he wigwagged familiarly.

The bar was noisy and crowded, not only a late crowd for cocktails, but many faces, particularly female, he'd never seen here before. The girls were dolls, expensive ones, and so Logan's coterie of furriers, jewelers, *modistes,* photographers, stylists, and other minions of New York's smart world stayed on and formed a very good cover. Very probably, there were even a few legitimate deals in the making.

McLeod gave his coat to the hat girl, but Logan, at his elbow, took it from her. He signaled over Richie, and covertly hefting the coat himself, told that slick-haired, side-glancing torpedo, "Put Mac's coat in my office. It will just get knocked on the floor in the coat-room."

It was a light colored coat and the statement was probably true, but of course what he'd wanted to do was heft the coat for a gun. Or, it crossed McLeod's mind, delay any swift departure that McLeod might wish to make, such as, say, in company with somebody he met at the bar.

Well, it had happened before, but not so lately. He shrugged and lit a cigarette and took a table for want of space at the bar. He knew the neighborhood merchants who frequented this spot—the vulture-nosed, tightly dressed Madam Olga who owned a fur shop; the rotund, wart-nosed Steigheimer, who owned a very toni jewelry store; Carnadine Dawn, who did poodle's coiffures for fabulous prices; Jan Thiery, who did their mistresses' heads; Dr. Verblon, who did very well discreetly treating various troubles of the ladies.

He was not alone for long, and his company was constantly shifting. It was one time he could have wished for less friendliness. A half-dozen of the town's biggest narcotic pushers were there with girls and he might have picked up a lead by watching them closely. Three others came in while he was

on his first drink, all of them feeling or reaching toward their upper right-hand pockets after checking their coats.

In all three cases, there was a slight bulge inside the coat, and certainly, there wouldn't be three southpaws in succession. It almost had to mean that they carried a thick sheaf of money. Sooner or later they disappeared with Al Logan into his office.

One came out still tapping a piece of paper against his other palm, and even a brief distant glance told McLeod it was a simple receipt for cash—in this case, thirty-two thousand, five hundred dollars.

He had seen money dropped here before, but never a line up like this. The S.P. had known about it even before Frank McLeod was put on the job. The S.P. also knew something else. At the time that the money was handed over, Bellows had seldom decided which of many fronts would be used as delivery point for the packages of raw supplies. So Al could not tell them where to go, and there was still the puzzle of communications. It was conceivable that Al was never in the know on the delivery end of the operations.

McLeod cursed to himself under the easy chatter of his conversation with the bright-eyed female vulture who was trying to lure him into finding a Valentine present for Ellen at her shop.

There was a fight at the Garden tonight and the crowd began breaking abruptly. With the big money boys leaving, the merchants had no cause to stay. The vulture invited McLeod to come along to the Tulip for dinner, and he was on the verge of accepting when he caught Logan's look and made a hasty excuse.

WHEN THE CROWD had cleared, Al Logan sucked a lungful of breath and expelled it forcibly. He walked slowly toward McLeod's table. He stood in front of McLeod, smiling faintly, relaxing from the hustle into his more normal state—coat unbuttoned, exposing a diamond tie clip, hands in his trouser pockets.

He was rolling slightly on his feet as he hummed some favorite tune. He wore his brown hair short-cropped, and he had a square, smiling face, and a slight paunch.

Had McLeod not known what he was, he might have pegged him as the athletic director of some boys club, or maybe a successful construction salesman. He was easygoing, good-humored, and one had to look very searchingly to see the pyramids of bleak granite, way deep in the centers of his brown eyes.

McLeod asked smilingly, "What do you do with all that money, Al? Put it on the ponies?"

"Well, if I'm a book they never

caught me at it!" Al grinned. "Order me a drink," he added. "I'll tote up and then I've got a surprise for you."

He moved toward his small office, jerking his head at the front door. Richie glided toward it, flipping a bolt and taking a seat at a small table to the right of it. Rocky, the other regular gunman here, took a seat at a twin table across the doorway.

McLeod ordered Al's drink and a refill and looked at the gangsters with amusement at their contrast. Richie was so slight as to look boyish, with wrists the size of a girl's, and an always conscious vanity of his hair. His eyes were glittering and deepset, and if his thin lips had ever smiled, McLeod felt sure it was at somebody's funeral.

In contrast, Rocky was muscular, larded, almost awkward of movement, with curly hair always in rebellion, and the brooding look of a smoldering volcano that may shower the night with red hot lava without advance warning. Rocky liked him, Ritchie hated his guts. But he was equally safe, or unsafe, with either one. They killed on orders. Execution was their business.

It struck McLeod suddenly that neither torpedo was looking directly at him tonight. Usually, Richie watched him with cold malevolence, while Rocky looked as if he'd like to speak, but felt it would interfere with his brooding.

It was an item that broke through his weariness and boredom, and for the moment, alerted him, pouring adrenalin through his athletic body. But of course, there was an explantion. The money was being recounted. The staccato punch and zip of Al's adding machine came from the office. The executioners would be listening for any sounds outside that entrance doorway.

The adding machine made its grinding total burp and shortly Al came from the office, relaxed, humming, ready to enjoy his drink and McLeod's company. He looked at the door guards, who immediately snapped off the bolt and sank into the rose-tinted shadows at the back of the room.

Al dropped a quarter in the juke box and sat down, tilting his chair on its back legs, and regarding McLeod with a benevolent smile.

He said, "Mac, I'm interested in a kid hoofer who's trying to get some notice from the East Side crowd. He's a tap dancer, but he's the only one I ever knew who can improvise as well as do a regular routine. He's terrific. I want you to take a run with me and catch his act."

"I've got to meet Ellen Adams here at midnight," McLeod said.

Al glanced at the expensive gold watch on his heavy-muscled wrist. "We can catch the ten-thirty show and be back in time. That is, if my dumb bookie gets here in

time. He laughed. "I've got winners at two tracks, and a parlay for seven football teams tomorrow! All guaranteed, in the bag. So I'll be bumming quarters by the end of the week."

There was a part he liked in the jukebox recording and he looked almost sentimental as he glanced up at the ceiling and sang the words, low, subdued, far back in his throat, but in a pleasant tenor, and with the feeling of a man enjoying himself. He wasn't bad. He wasn't bad at all. He was a man McLeod could have liked if he hadn't been in this dirty racket.

"Is this kid hoofer the surprise you had for me?" McLeod asked finally.

"Part of it," Logan replied, nodding. "But just something extra, like the candy canes on the Christmas tree. The big thing is, Mr. Sunshine's going to give you a once-over."

McLeod sat forward. He didn't have to act his excitement. *"When?"*

Al Logan chuckled and rolled his shoulders. "When he feels like it. Maybe tonight, maybe tomorrow." He drank off his glass and looked at the ice. "There'll be some things he wants to ask you. He has his own way of sizing people up."

For some reason, the S.P.'s final words came back to him. "Don't be afraid to fade out if you think they've put the finger on you. They'll get the truth out of you the vicious way, and that won't do you, or us any good."

"I've had them beat on a bucket covering my head," McLeod could still hear himself reminding the prosecutor.

"This mob doesn't operate that crude," the S.P. had said. "No more punching around, no more baseball bats. They use needles. Needles and truth serum and a psychiatrist. If you think you're hot—get out, while there's still time. If you can."

He didn't know why he'd entertained such forebodings. There was no indication of trouble here. Al was regarding him with more than ordinary amusement, obviously pleased with himself for bringing McLeod to Bellows' attention.

"Finally—the big break!" McLeod murmured, and he didn't have to act the sound of his voice, either.

"Everything comes to he who waits," Al grunted, a little careless of his grammar.

He could come out with some of the damnedest quotes! McLeod thought. He'd never opened up like this before; it could be the break he needed.

George, the bookie came in and ordered a Scotch and soda at the bar. Al joined him there. "Don't get those horses and football teams mixed up like you did one time," he said, and laughed. "There are some with the same names but

different bets." He handed the bookie several sheets of paper.

"Getting more play on Ohio," George noted.

"Not as well known and better odds," Al said.

Same old betting talk. It rattled on McLeod's ears like hail. But all of the fatigue and boredom and frustration had drained out of him now. He felt like a waterfront ferret overtaking a pack of wharf rats.

Al Logan finished his business with George and said, "Let's go, Mac."

They pulled on their coats and grabbed a cab. "Easier than parking," Al explained, and gave the address—an off beat basement club that had once been a speakeasy, in long-dead days beyond recall. The address sounded as if it were a clip joint for visiting firemen.

THE EARLY SHOW was beginning when they got there. The offstage lights were dimmed, but McLeod saw that the place was crowded. In the shadows, he recognized some of the cocktail crowd from earlier.

Al was doing all right by this boy! It was the kind of interest which spelt out the difference between make or break for talent in neon lights.

They ordered drinks. They needed them. The MC was terrible, the chorus and first dance acts almost as bad. Al called a waiter and peeled a twenty off his roll. "Take it back to the kid before he goes on," he said. "Tell him that's to wipe the glue off his hoofs."

The waiter had started when McLeod said, "Al, you had two bills stuck together there."

The waiter stopped. Al's eyes darted to the bills he held. Then he waved an expansive hand. "What the hell, I wouldn't have known. But see that the kid gets it, not you. I know *now*."

The waiter grinned and hurried off.

"You must really like this boy," McLeod grunted.

"I'm not the only one," Al chuckled. "Wait till you hear the hands he gets."

The kid came on. He wasn't such a kid at that. But he could dance. McLeod had to hand him that. He could damned near tap your name in sound. He could build a rhythm up to an explosive crescendo like the holding of a high E on a coronet. He brought the customers right into the act. He'd stop in front of their tables and snap his fingers to emphasize the beat.

"A-one, a-two, a-three," he'd breathe and tap, maybe four steps, maybe nine, and then swing out into the wildest improvised rhythm and dance McLeod had ever seen.

McLeod fell under the spell. He found he was picking up the kid's taps and following them through

with his own hand tapping on the table. And then he found there was something strangely familiar to this. He couldn't believe it, he couldn't believe it could be improvised, but he followed through again, and came up with the international wireless code being used for abbreviations.

"A-one, a-two, a-three—" and five taps. for somebody there, that said either Pier 35 or 35th Street, two p.m. sharp, watch out for guard. Or maybe, "guard O.K." Or a different address: "A" for apartment. Then: "Seven, Ring two short, two short, code, Is Mary home?"

The efficiency with which the kid tapped out these messages was such a shock that Frank McLeod almost stopped, almost turned to Al to blurt out his consternation. He caught himself in time. This *could* be it!

Al turned to him. "Think he's good?"

A cold grey feeling ran down McLeod's back as he nodded, "Terrific! Got feet like castenets."

But what he was thinking was, he was deep in the soup now or he wouldn't have been brought here. Either he was on the spot, and so it didn't matter what he knew, or he was being taken into the mob after Bellows grilled him. But he thought of that prowl through the D.A.'s personnel file, and he thought of the goon who'd bought the gun on the subway station, and he had no doubt which of the two fates would be his by tomorrow.

The applause at the end of the act was thunderous. It would be. Probably a million dollars in narcotic traffic profits were expected out of this little dance.

That left the puzzle of how the kid got his instructions. On a sheet between two twenty dollars bills, of course. How else? Probably they were usually sealed along the edges. Tonight they'd happened to come unstuck a little.

He had another drink and waited for Al to give him a hint or two of why he'd been brought here. But Al said nothing. He just looked pleasantly excited, as if the act had stimulated him enormously, making him think of something that was definitely to his liking.

Well, he could like bringing McLeod to Bellows' attention either way McLeod turned out. If McLeod was a real pusher, he'd make a profitable one. If he was a pigeon, and they found out in time—and they'd make sure it *was* in time well in advance!—Al would get a bonus for suspicioning McLeod and still keeping him on the hook.

McLeod decided to find out about that fast. He got up with an excuse about needing to make room for another drink. Al made an amiable rejoinder and looked briefly beyond McLeod. Two hoods got up to go in ahead of

him. Two more followed behind. He couldn't have made a break for the front door if he had wanted to.

He walked in, boxed on all sides, tensed so tight he couldn't have used the head, expecting a slug or a shot at any second. Nothing happened. But the first two hoods loitered to follow him, and the other pair never came in. They turned and moved back through the tables ahead of him, not taking their seats until he was seated.

"Your boys always so anxious to escort a man?" he asked.

Al chuckled. "That's Bellows for you. Never takes a chance. But that's just while you're being considered. When he's made up his mind, things will be different."

McLeod would have given his shirt to have been able to see Al Logan's eyes. He tried, but the lights were very dim. Things might still be all right. But it was one chance in a million. Everything so far had been all wrong.

He said with a bite of temper he'd have been entitled to, "Maybe after the Inquisition, I can ask where the hell Moira is?"

"Well, she's not far. She just hasn't been in," Al said smoothly. "But you may be seeing her real shortly."

So the mob didn't know that the S.P. knew for certain—that she was dead. But McLeod knew it, and the answer told him what he needed to know. They were simply doing some final bit of checkup. They were damned near certain that he was the S.P.'s undercover man.

By rights the knowledge should have filled him with fear, panic, a mounting tension. Instead of that, it calmed him. The knot of tension had vanished from his neck. He had to play this thing out cool now. Real cool. He couldn't let Al Logan know he suspected anything fishy in this.

He tossed off his drink and said with a wry laugh, "Well, I'll be damned glad when Mr. Sunshine okays me!"

"When he says the word, things go fast," Al assured him.

They got up to leave. Al took his time, saying a word here and there as he passed between the tables. He made no effort to cover McLeod himself. He left that to the four efficient hoods.

THERE WAS A taxi in front of the door when they came out. Driven by one of the mob, McLeod felt convinced. He reached for the window roller to drop the window. He couldn't budge it. He was sure that his door was locked from the outside, too. They were taking no chances.

They got back to the Red Lounge shortly before midnight. Al ordered food for them and they had just started eating when Ellen came in. She looked five years younger with her *chichi* town

paint missing and dressed in sport clothes.

Ellen sat down and had a drink. McLeod sang paeans of praise about the kid hoofer.

"Are you tight?" she laughed. "You sound like an Elvis fan!"

"No, but you've got to see this boy!" McLeod enthused. He told her about the act all over again.

She watched him with amusement that changed to a puzzled seriousness as he kept the line up. This kind of gushing enthusiasm just wasn't his way. Yet he wasn't drunk, and he was definitely trying to impress her with his description of the kid hoofer.

Without any evidence of more than casual interest, Al Logan was listening to every word. Maybe Ellen caught that—as a smart woman would—even before she realized that McLeod was trying to tell her something.

McLeod could see that idea take hold of her. He could almost feel her shrewd mind trying to grope through the confusion of his talk to find the hidden meaning of whatever he was trying to tell her.

Something was wrong, somewhere. She flicked Al a casual glance, but could read nothing from his expression. Still, if something was wrong that McLeod didn't want to say in front of Al, why didn't he draw her aside and speak to her privately?

Then it struck her. He couldn't. Al was part of the picture, part of the danger. Mac was trapped—couldn't break away.

McLeod saw the knowledge strike her, and prayed silently that she wouldn't give herself away. She was perfect in her acting. There was just one brief instant when she became expansive and then snapped tight again. Indolently, she mashed out her cigarette and lighted up another.

McLeod knew that he'd have to help her play it straight and correctly. He said quickly, "Listen, Ellen, I'm not the only one in town who's raving! You've got to see this boy right away. You should have heard the hand he got from Al's hard-boiled friends. He really raised them!"

"Oh?" she pouted. "It was a family party and you didn't ask me along?"

"Well, it wasn't quite family," he said, smiling. "I'd hate to have a family like some of those characters!"

Al looked at him with appreciative humor and laughed. So far, so good. He was sure now he'd gotten the importance of the tap dancer across to Ellen. But there was still one missing link in the chain—how did Bellows manage to get his packaging crews their orders on what to pack and for whom?

Suddenly he knew. The missing link had been right in front of him for weeks.

George. George the bookie with the nose like W. C. Field's. It had

to be! He recalled what he could of the random conversation Al had held with the man—so casual, so open, so obviously betting talk.

The football teams, for instance. Ohio. 'O' stood for opium, its uses not as well known as heroin and cocaine. And the horse sheets for heroin, of course. With all the packaging data coded as bets for each of the customers! He had it now! And if he could get away from Al and his goons, he could break the case tonight.

McLeod reached Ellen's hand across the table and squeezed it. Al saw that. But McLeod gave no signals, transferred no note, and was careful to speak casually. He told Ellen, "You should have been here earlier. Al's got a bookie called George who's the spitting image of W. C. Field. He catch the act tonight, Al?"

"I doubt it," Al said with a stretch. "Takes him about all night to make book."

And all night to contact the various packagers and give them the code orders on what dope to include! McLeod thought.

Ellen frowned slightly, knowing her gambling pretty well. McLeod was afraid she was going to ask what George was doing making book so far ahead of the races and games.

But she kept her head. She thought her own question over and swallowed it. She just sat there toying with her cigarette and drink, cloaking her thoughts behind a Mona Lisa smile—the kind of smile a woman wears when she's near a man she likes, but doesn't understand a word he's saying.

She stretched finally and said, "Well, what about our drive to the country?"

Al glanced up quickly, and gave McLeod a definite look. "We have that business to settle, Mac," he remarked. "It would be better if you could stick around."

Oh, he was smooth, McLeod thought! He glanced at the bar mirror and caught the oblique reflection of Al's two gun hands back in the shadows. Al was just making a friendly suggestion—but just let McLeod try to leave with Ellen!

McLeod took her hand again while he made apologies. Ellen shrugged, acting the part of a spoiled doll, miffed by upset plans, but not ready to ruin her looks in an argument over it.

"Business first, of course!" she sniffed. "Well, at least I'll get some sleep for a change."

"Look, Ellen," McLeod told her with undernotes of seriousness that he didn't need to pretend, "I've been waiting for this break for weeks. And it may be an all night session."

"Will I see you tomorrow?"

"I was trying to figure out a time schedule," he told her. "I'll probably sleep late. In any case, I don't want to rush to see

that damned lawyer about your brother."

McLeod's heart was doing a tap dance as her brows knitted with puzzlement. But she didn't question him. He breathed easier.

"Tell you, you've got his phone number at the house." He was watching her closely. "Same one as five years ago. Why don't you phone him for me and say that I can't possibly keep my appointment with him tomorrow, but that I've got all the loot. He can go ahead and fix things."

Al was bent over his plate eating, but McLeod saw the muscles of his back tauten, and his fork stop under his mouth as he probed this conversation.

"Got a little trouble in the family Ellen?" Al asked softly.

"It's nothing," Ellen said irritably. "Mac helped him duck a felony rap five years ago and this is just something to clear his record."

Al looked inquiringly at McLeod. McLeod said, "Well, why carry a dirty slate? It doesn't make you any tougher."

He turned back to Ellen. "That robber's kind of touchy about broken dates, so be sure to impress him that I at least remembered I had the date."

"Sure," Ellen nodded. She had the pitch now. She'd caught it from that reference to the kid's lawyer —which had been the D.A. "What'll I tell him for excuse?"

"Oh, hell, tell him anything. I'm at my grandma's funeral, I've got smallpox, I'm being cremated!"

They all laughed and the moment of tension as the subject roused Al's alertness had passed. McLeod took a long breath of relief.

Ellen stubbed her cigarette out and leaned over to peck him on the cheek. "I think you're a heel to stand me up, but it will give me a night's sleep for a change."

"Take my car," he told her and gave her the key. "I can grab a cab, and you can park all night on your street."

She got up and gave Al a smile without a tenseness or a shadow in it. "Can you put arsenic in his drink?" she asked.

"For you, I might." Al grinned.

They saw her to the door.

"Great gal," Al said. "That serious about her brother?"

"Nothing to it that some loot won't cure," McLeod chuckled.

He dropped a quarter in the juke box. Al moved around with that rolling gait on the balls of his feet, humming or singing the tunes. He had the manner of a man waiting for something but in no great rush about it.

McLeod had another drink and prayed that Ellen would figure the message out and connect his insane talk about the kid hoofer as part of it when she talked with the D.A. The D.A. would get the importance of it, of course. He'd had no date with McLeod tomorrow.

A few customers dropped in and out. There was no change in the atmosphere or in Al's friendly manner. Here McLeod was waiting for his death sentence, and these lugs were waiting to carry it out. But nothing was happening—nothing at all!

That was why Bellows was at the top. He took his time. He worked smooth and cool.

Well, McLeod might be a corpse when it happened, but at least he'd turned the tables. By the time the S.P. went over the talk with Ellen, he'd figure the deal out. The kid hoofer, George the bookie, "Tell him I've been cremated."

With those leads they could pick up most of the evidence they needed. There'd never be a kickback at Ellen. If Bellows looked up her brother's record, they'd find it, and forget her. They'd puzzle like hell, but it would be too late. They would have murdered him, so they'd just have to puzzle.

He wondered just why Al Logan had taken him to see the hoofer tonight. Maybe hoping McLeod would catch the code and it would shock him into some startled statement. Maybe kind of a farewell supper.

An odd murder for precaution wouldn't mean anything to this mob ordinarily. But they were hot now, and they knew it, and they'd not be asking for extra trouble. They were checking all angles.

McLeod yawned and looked at the time. Al said, "Yeah, me too. You better come up and stay at my place in case Mr. Sunshine calls."

"That's a damn good idea," McLeod agreed innocently. "I'll stop on the way and change clothes."

Al looked dubious about the stop, but there was nothing to indicate McLeod had any idea he was on the spot. Al yawned himself and got their coats. He told the two gorillas, "Tail us with the car. We'll walk."

LOGAN HAD HIS hands in his pockets and he was singing in his low, clear, happy voice as they turned up the avenue toward McLeod's hotel. He broke off once to say, "Mac, you know, I'm glad I got the chance to know you. You've been worth knowing."

They neared the lighted canopy of the hotel. On the steps, Al laid a hand on McLeod's arm. When McLeod looked at him, the hard granite pyramids were in the center of his eyes, but there was no sadism, no savagery in him as he said, "Don't do anything in here that makes me jumpy, Mac. It's always a little tense when a man's up for final decision."

"Sure," McLeod nodded. He was thinking of that other gun in his bureau drawer, wondering if he'd left the safety on, if he had a bullet in the chamber.

"By the way," Al added. "The boys stopped over and took your gun to check it against permits."

The last bottom dumped out of McLeod's world. Suddenly, the cold efficiency of this mob smote him. All of the wild, tense frustration of the past months rose up in him like an atomic mushroom. If he had to die, he would at least do it fighting! Maybe in the open like this, he'd give the S.P. a better case than he'd expected.

He half turned to jump Al before he came off the steps.

Then he saw Riley Grimes leap from the black D.A. car with drawn pistol. Somewhere out of sight, cops were cursing the two trailing gunmen.

Grimes, always cool, yelled, "*McLeod!* Stop where you are and lift your hands!"

Al spun toward Grimes, jerked back to look at McLeod with surprise, then started to bolt for the lobby, an animal in escape. Two uniformed cops ran toward him with drawn guns, coming from another entrance. He stopped, and deftly dropped his own gun in a potted plant. He was cool as ice when they grabbed him.

"Who's he?" Grimes was demanding of McLeod.

"*Al?* He's not in my mix," McLeod said wearily. "He's just a bar manager walking me home."

Grimes turned to the smaller, spectacled man who followed him in. "What about it, Chief?"

"We want Frank McLeod. But he was alone on that job. Take the other punk's name and let him go."

Al gave his name and answered a few curt questions. He looked at McLeod with curiosity and ironic humor. "Tough luck, Mac, but maybe not as tough as you think," he said laconically. "Well, stop around when it's over."

McLeod nodded and a cop strong-armed him into the lobby as Al moved out the door.

McLeod took out his handkerchief and wiped his forehead. This had sure been an evening of good luck and good acting. Thank God, Ellen had a mind as well as body!

The chief gave him a smoke and said, "She's a real smart young lady, even if she did get me out of bed! We missed you at the Red Lounge, but spotted you walking. We were worried when Ellen mentioned smallpox and cremation. On the spot and good as dead, eh?"

McLeod smiled wearily. "I still must have goofed somewhere," he acknowledged.

His chief tried not to look self-conscious and chuckled. "You're not listed on our personnel sheet, so it wasn't that. But maybe you let them see that address book of rich hopheads?"

"What about it?" McLeod asked.

"Well, unfortunately, it contained the name of a society woman who's been dead forty years."

The chief laughed. "That's older than you. Bellows probably wanted to grill you about that."

The chief stood up. "We'll wrap this up in a day or two. I don't think they'll wise up to this phony arrest." He looked McLeod over enviously. "You look like you could do with a rest. How would you like to run up to the Berkshires for a week or so?"

McLeod glared at his chief with his face firing. "Whose crazy idea was that—*yours*?"

His chief made an airy, negative gesture. "Not mine. I'd send you to Dannamora. But Miss Ellen Adams said she had filled your car with gas—our car, when you bring it back—and she'd be waiting for you at her apartment."

McLeod smiled slowly. "Put a woman in a nice quiet case and all hell breaks loose!" he grunted. "But she's in for some disillusionment. She thinks I'm rich."

"Oh no she doesn't," his chief told him. "She asked me if you'd lose any pay if she took you away."

McLeod gawked at him. "How did she know about—" His voice failed.

"You may kid a mob like Bellows, but you can't kid a woman like Ellen very long!" His chief laughed. "Now good night, good night!"

McLeod moved out into the pre-dawn freshness and hailed a cab for Ellen's.

WATCH FOR THE NEW STORY BY

THOMAS CALVERT McCLARY

In the next issue

GOOD SOUND THERAPY

It wouldn't have been strictly true to say that elderly Dr. Fogg was a psychiatrist without a conscience. But his limitations in that respect made the wrong diagnosis dangerous.

by

ROG PHILLIPS

DR. MELVIN FOGG sighed heavily and shut off the array of instrument panels and recording meters that occupied most of the desk-space in his therapy room.

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"We aren't getting anywhere yet, Walter," he said, crossing to the man lying on the analysis table. At his words the voice typewriter beside the desk clattered swiftly. "Of course this is only our fifth session. We can't expect much yet. But we should be picking up one or two clear-cut syndromes by now and we aren't. I could almost believe you are consciously hiding everything from me that is of any importance."

He began unstrapping electrodes from the wrists, temples, ankles, and bared chest of the patient.

"We haven't even established your truth curve. Your reactions are too mixed up. For example when you think of your wife you go into a rejection psychosis that would be interpreted by an ordinary technician as lying—that you actually had no wife at all. But that is because you reject her. To your subconscious you *have* no wife."

The voice typewriter ejected the sheet of paper into the hopper and inserted another, then typed faster to catch up. Dr. Foggiwether sighed again.

The patient, Walter Myers, freed of the dozens of electrodes, sat up. He was a small, thin man, about thirty, with sandy hair and eyebrows, and sallow, slightly freckled skin.

"I'm trying not to hide anything," he said defensively.

"Yes, yes, I know." Dr. Fogg ran his stubby fingers through his mane of thick black hair and brought his bushy eyebrows together in a frown.

"I wouldn't throw away twenty-five dollars every Wednesday if I didn't intend for you to do me some good."

"Let's hope not," Dr. Fogg grunted. He glanced at the gold wristwatch on his thick, hairy wrist. "My next patient is waiting. You can find your way out, Walter. Down the hall to the side door."

"Of course, Doc." Walter Myers slipped into his suitcoat, the right hand pocket slapping his side from the weight of something small and heavy. His eyes darted in alarm to the doctor who seemed not to have noticed.

In the hallway he pressed his ear to the door until he heard the doctor's deep voice and a reply in a shrill female voice. Then on tiptoe he stole down the hall to another closed door. With great care he turned the knob and inched the door open.

The room he entered was a comfortably furnished office with wall to wall carpeting, a walnut desk, walnut-finish, all metal file cabinet and strongbox assembly, davenport, floor lamps, and three large comfortable chairs. The drapes over the windows were partly open, letting in enough moonlight to make objects in the room visible.

Walter Myers took the heavy object from his pocket. It was a blue-steel, blunt-nosed revolver. He released the safety on it, then climbed over the davenport and settled down behind it to wait.

His eyes glittered feverishly in the darkness . . .

DR. FOGG let Mrs. van Jason out the front door and locked it, and turned out the lights in the waiting room on his way back through. In the therapy room he put away the electrodes, and stared moodily at the array of instruments on his desk, wishing he knew more of what they could tell him.

If only he knew how to read them.

He did know, of course—as well as the average psychiatrist. But all it brought him was a clearer realization of how little he knew about the human mind. God, how little! The primary function of all this modern equipment still remained the one of dazzling the patient.

Dr. Fogg picked up the stack of typed sheets from the hopper behind the voice typewriter.

Why did he feel so depressed tonight? It had all the earmarks of presentiment. He chuckled dryly at the thought. Presentiment was one manifestation of the god-drive, the attempt of the archetypal *I*-symbol to occupy the central symbol position, to be God, to exercise the sophism, *I am omniscient, therefore I am invincible.*

That heavy object in Walter Myers' pocket had bothered him. But it had probably been only an apple. No, not round enough for an apple. Perhaps a bottle of aspirins. Certainly not a gun.

Still, a negative little psychopathic liar like Walter might some day turn into a killer to protect his lies. You stood and listened to him and impressed him with encephalographs, cardiographs, neurographs, a clattering voice typewriter that typed page after page for the wastebasket, and prayed the lid would stay on while you worked it dangerously loose.

Dr. Fogg turned out the lights in the therapy room and went out into the hall. Here with all the doors shut it was peaceful and quiet—a symbol of life's road, perhaps. Straight toward the grave, down at the end of the hall, with doors every few steps that opened into rooms, the symbols of jobs, ways of life, marriages. But always again there was the hallway, with the door at the end leading into the hereafter—and the garbage can.

Smiling at his little joke he went down the hall and out to the back stoop, and dropped the day's accumulation of typewritten sheets into the garbage can. A practical and sensible act, but

also having its adverse symbolic effect on his mind as he well knew. More and more he was beginning to consider the purgative ramblings of his patients as deserving no other fate.

Returning to the hall he closed and locked the door, then walked quickly to the door to his private office, feeling almost cheerful as he opened it. He turned on the lights and crossed to the filing cabinet. He twirled the combination on the strongbox and pulled open the door. From its interior he brought out a half filled fifth of a good grade of whiskey and carried it to the desk with him and sat down.

Leaning back, he tipped the bottle to his lips and drank several swallows as though it were water. Then he put the bottle down in front of him and sat very still, waiting for the alcohol to work.

Suddenly the impulse to get really drunk possessed him. He lifted his bushy eyebrows in surprise at the impulse. His trained mind went to work tracing it to its source.

That premonition. That damned premonition. He hadn't gotten rid of it. He had pushed it down and it had come up again—as a desire to get drunk.

He took another stiff drink, and leaned back, half closing his eyes.

Then he said, only because he had to say something, "Well what in the world are you doing here, Walter?"

Walter Myers had stood up behind the davenport, his snub nosed revolver pointed at Dr. Fogg.

"Stand up," Walter Myers rasped. "Stand up and don't make any sudden moves. Cup your hands against the back of your head."

Very carefully Dr. Fogg obeyed, and at the same time he talked soothingly. "I understand what is driving you to this, Walter," he said. "Actually, you don't have to come back for more sessions. No law says you have to. No, it is *something within you* that says *you must*—and to escape that commanding voice you feel you must do this thing. Isn't that so?"

"Nuts," Walter said. "You're a lousy quack. Nothing is wrong with me. Absolutely nothing. You hear?"

"Of course there isn't, Walter," Dr. Fogg said, straightening up, his hands locked behind his head. "Nothing monumental, at any rate. If I've seen it once I've seen it a thousand times, a person concealing something that he would almost rather die than confess. And almost invariably it is something perfectly normal *which he has been taught since early childhood to think of as a monstrous sin!*"

He saw the amusement in Walter's expression.

"Now," Dr. Fogg said, smiling with a calmness that belied the beads of persperation on his forehead, "You feel safe. You are going to kill me, so that I can never learn what it is you hide from yourself and the world."

Walter Myers put one leg carefully over the back of the davenport and sat straddling it while he brought the other up.

"You sound to me, Doc," he said, "As if you *wished* me to kill you." He sat on the back of the davenport with his feet on the cushion, and for an instant there was a look of sympathy and pity in his eyes.

Dr. Fogg saw the pity and it terrified him. He was quite sure that only a killer who had made up his mind to kill could experience pity at such a moment. But perhaps he could capitalize on it . . .

"Possibly I do—or part of me does, anyway," he said heavily. And in seeming blind forgetfulness he lumbered up from his chair and came around the desk, putting his hands in his pockets. In the center of the room he stopped, aware of the flattening of Walter's eyes, and the whitening of his knuckle against the trigger.

As Walter slowly relaxed again Dr. Fogg breathed a silent prayer of thanks. He was in a much better position now.

"You almost got it right then," Walter Myers said.

"Sorry," Dr. Fogg said gruffly. "I forgot myself." He waited an appropriate interval, then added, "In the therapy room I am used to keeping my own feelings in the background. Here in my private office—" He nodded toward the whiskey bottle. "My feelings come out." He smiled a twisted smile. "Would you like a drink, Walter?"

"Ha!" Walter snorted. "You'd like the chance to turn the tables on me and send for the police."

"No, Walter, I would like to help you."

"I thought you wanted me to help *you,*" Walter Myers said, smiling slightly.

Dr. Fogg nodded. This might be the way out. Walter seemed to be swinging to a somewhat paranoid expansiveness. It might pay to coax it along a bit. "Maybe I do," he said slowly. "In some ways, sometimes, I'm as confused as my patients seem to be."

"And you think maybe *I* could help *you?*" Walter Myers said, a toying indecision in his voice and expression.

Dr. Fogg found it difficult to conceal his surge of hope. He was succeeding! With remarkable self control he put on an expression of almost hopeless discour-

agement and said, "I wish *somebody* would help me."

"Well . . ." Walter Myers stepped down off of the davenport. "As a matter of fact, in a manner of speaking, that's what I was planning on doing. I really don't want to kill you, unless I have to. You see, like you I'm a specialist in my line of work. I specialize in helping people like you."

"What is your line of work?" Dr. Fogg asked eagerly. Things were working fine now. Later, when Walter was gone, he could have his nervous reaction, but right now he must play his fish with infinite care.

"I'm a thief," Walter Myers said.

Dr. Fogg blinked. "A—a what?" he said.

"Let's see if I can get you to understand," Walter Myers said. "As you know, most people's aberrations stem from their search for a father-substitute. Some tear up traffic tickets to force the police to punish them. One special kind, the kind I'm interested in, doesn't tear up traffic tickets. Instead, they fail to report all their income. They report enough to keep from being investigated. The rest? They can't bank it because then it would be on record, so they keep it in cash somewhere where they can get their hands on it quickly."

Dr. Fogg's face began to turn pasty. His eyes darted toward the open strongbox section of the file cabinet, and away again with great rapidity.

"What they subconsciously want," Walter Myers said, smiling, "Is—not the money—but to be caught at it and punished so they can feel that someone or something—Fate, perhaps—has become a father-substitute to them. And that's where I come in. I locate such people. It's fairly easy. You'd be surprised how many there are. When I find one I study him until I know all I need to know. Then I step in and take the money he's saved up. He doesn't dare report the theft because then the revenue boys would want to know where he got so much money. He just has to take it on the chin and keep his mouth shut, like any well-disciplined kid getting a licking."

Walter Myers inched toward the strongbox, his gun pointed at Dr. Fogg's chest.

"Don't move, Dr. Fogg," he said as he filled his pockets with packs of currency. "Don't try anything foolish that will get you killed. Try to understand that what I'm doing is for your own good. It's rough." Walter Myers shook his head in what appeared to be genuine sympathy.

"But it's good sound therapy."

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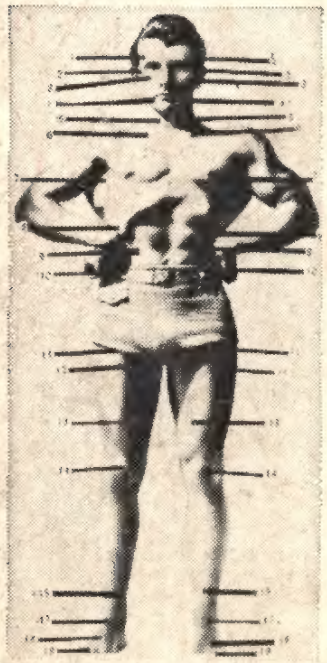

KARATE Teaches you the Pressure Points of Your Opponent So that you can Render him Absolutely Helpless in Seconds.

Karate will teach you all aronud self defense in weeks. It can be learned at home—alone. It is the traditional Oriental method for dealing with malicious and armed attack. Its objective and function is to disarm, subdue or cripple an enemy who may come unexpectedly out of the dark. It makes you the equal of any man of any weight or experience. It teaches you instantaneous, automatic defense against the most unexpected attacks. Karate is a weapon no man can take away from you. Once you know Karate, you will fear no muggers, you'll not be shamed by some street corner gang insulting your girl as you pass. You need nothing but your hands and feet, and a reasonably limber constitution. The more violent and brutal the attack upon you, the more effective your defense. Profusely illustrated with actual combat photos, and anatomical charts of man's nerve centers, pressure points, and weak spots. Defense against injurious holds and blows explained by some of America's leading experts, including masters of judo recognized among the top most masters of Japan. The Japanese police and Army combat troops use KARATE, to subdue criminals and in the battlefield. For first hand knowledge, ask some friend who fought in the Pacific! Now, adapted to American athletic standards and techniques, you can learn the fundamentals of this master defense by yourself, at home, in weeks.

Devised by the ancient Japanese Professionals, Karate is the self-defense Hand to Hand combat system that is faster, more effective than judo. Karate has been used in Japan for hundreds of years! Karate was published with action packed photos teaching you how to handle gun and knife attacks, street fighters and muggers!

You will learn just where the Karate striking points and positions are. **You** will learn the best defense against annoying attacks and serious attacks. Karate was used by the hand picked guards of the Japanese Emperor. Yet men and women find it is easier to learn than judo. Until recently Karate technique was kept secret and originally used only for the Emperor's guards. In this very well illustrated book you are taught by one of the outstanding authors on Karate technique and everything is simplified, explained and shown so that you can more easily master the art. The anatomical charts show the pressure points for fatal, serious and mild blows, that's why its only for those who are over 18 years of age. You'll see how easy it is to render your opponent completely helpless. You'll never know how **confident** you will feel even among men much **bigger** than **you** are until you learn Karate. **With this book** you will fear **no man.** You will turn your feet, your elbows, and your fingers and hands into such super weapons that it will amaze you and your friends. Learn Karate self defense now! You never know when you need it! **It's for men and women.**

SOLD ON MONEY BACK GUARANTEE.
After receiving this Karate technique Book look it over, it must do everything this advertisement promises, it must raise your confidence in your ability Physically, it must teach you more about self defense than you ever knew before or you get your money back! Don't delay, order now on this money back guarantee. Mail coupon **now**! Karate teaches you the pressure points, etc., of your opponent so that you can render him absolutely helpless in seconds.

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NOTE: Purchasers should be 18 years of age or over or get parent's permission.